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Mary Ellen Leary
EDITORIALISTS ON
EL SALVADOR

ONE DOLLAR
MAY 22,1981

Saul Maloff on Hemingway, still alive & kicking (& biting & scratching . . .). *Jorge Luis Borges* on Whitman, poet of democracy. *David Bowman* on the background to bloodshed in Northern Ireland. *Gregory Baum* on Christianity, Marxism, & messianism. *Doris Grumbach* & *Rosemary Booth* on new novels by Francine du Plessix Gray & Marilynne Robinson. *Marianne Sawicki* on moral arts.

Richard de Mille on Castaneda the gnostic. *John Garvey* on William Thompson, Elaine Pagels, & assorted other gnostics. *John Carmody* on conversion & Robert McAfee Brown (no gnostic, he). *David Burrell* on David Tracy's 'A[illegible]on.'

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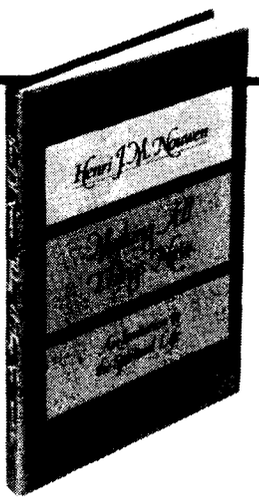

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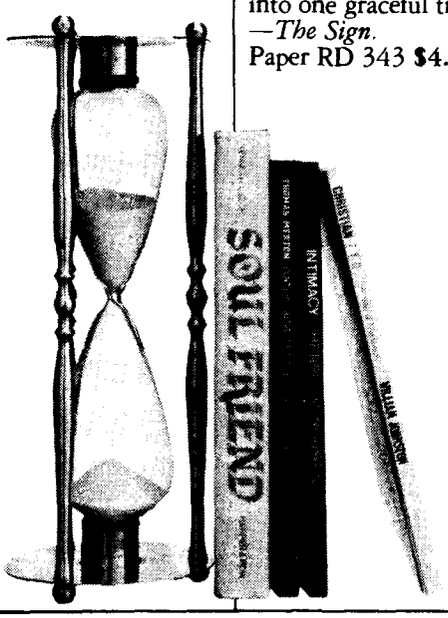

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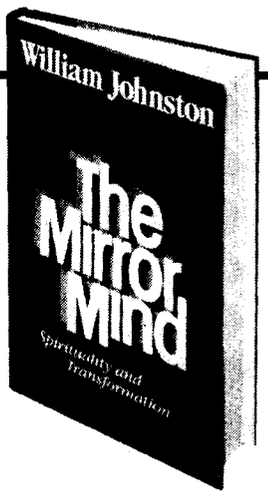

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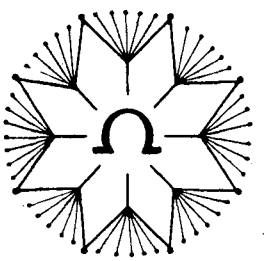

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Contents

Volume CVIII, Number 10

Editorials: 293

The press on El Salvador: *Mary Ellen Leary* 295

Iron law of institutions: *Thomas Powers* 298

The Gnostics among us: *John Garvey* 300

Hemingway alive: *Saul Maloff* 302

Walt Whitman, poet of democracy: *Jorge Luis Borges* 303

Screen: *Colin L. Westerbeck, Jr.* 305

Books

World Without End: *Doris Grumbach* 306

Housekeeping: *Rosemary Booth* 306

The Analogical Imagination: *David Burrell* 310

The Eagle's Gift: *Richard deMille* 311

Too Long a Sacrifice: *David J. Bowman* 312

Turning/Creative Dislocation: *John Carmody* 314

Marxism/Marx Against the Marxists: *Gregory Baum* 316

Religious booknotes: *Marianne Sawicki* 308

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A SCANDAL TO LEFT & RIGHT

NEVER IN recent memory has the Catholic church been such a scandal and puzzlement to the political left and right alike. A theologically conservative pope (a) lectures a dictator to his face on respect for human rights, (b) denounces Western materialism, and (c) threatens (it is said, on good grounds) to go to Poland and personally confront invading Soviet troops. The American bishops mobilize opposition to abortion — and reject capital punishment, urge arms limitation, and condemn the idea that solutions to the nation's economic problems should be taken out of the hides of the poor. The situation can be illustrated by a conversation that took place at the recent Washington march of twenty thousand or more dissenters from the administration's plan to increase our government's intervention on behalf of the Salvadoran junta while decreasing its intervention on behalf of the American needy. One of those left-wing activists who is still afflicted with the lingering belief that the Soviet bloc represents something "progressive" in the world was elaborating on the magnificent identification of the Catholic church with the struggle for human dignity in Central America. "And in Poland, too, don't you think?" added a Catholic marcher. The activist changed the subject.

There are intellectual roots for this growth of Catholic social presence: the tradition expressed in the great papal social encyclicals, the "opening" of the church to the world formally signaled at the Second Vatican Council. But the most important roots are existential: at a time when so many ideological forces for or against change are essentially the possession of the managers and commissars, the bureaucrats and oligarchs, the church retains, and in many cases has extended, its presence among ordinary people. If the church protests the government's abandonment of the South Bronx, it is not because church leaders are Keynesians but because the church is *in* the South Bronx. Catholics do not find themselves defending the rights of the poor in Latin America because they are Marxists; they have been attracted to Marxism because they were caught up in class struggles, about which Marxism appeared to have more to say than liberal capitalism. (See the editorial below.)

This concrete involvement is no safeguard against political misjudgments, even tragic ones. There is still a need for thinking through one's political commitments, for testing them against empirical evidence, for placing them in historical perspective. The harsh experience of economic oppression or political brutality may galvanize people into political action; by itself, it does not provide sure guidelines for the course of that action. And religious activists have been known to leap all too readily from one orthodoxy to another.

The involvement of Catholic activists or church leaders in political struggles is not beyond discussion or criticism. But the notion that such involvement is misplaced altogether is untenable. And almost as unsatisfactory is the effort to discredit such

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involvement as simply naive—the upshot of current attacks on missionaries and clergy in Latin America. Yes, sometimes naïveté is a problem; but the critics should temper their conclusions with some reflections on the naïveté that sees things so clearly from thousands of miles away, the frequently deadly naïveté of Western economic experts and Pentagon planners. Mistakes will be made, but somehow we have more confidence in those who are risking them from up close.

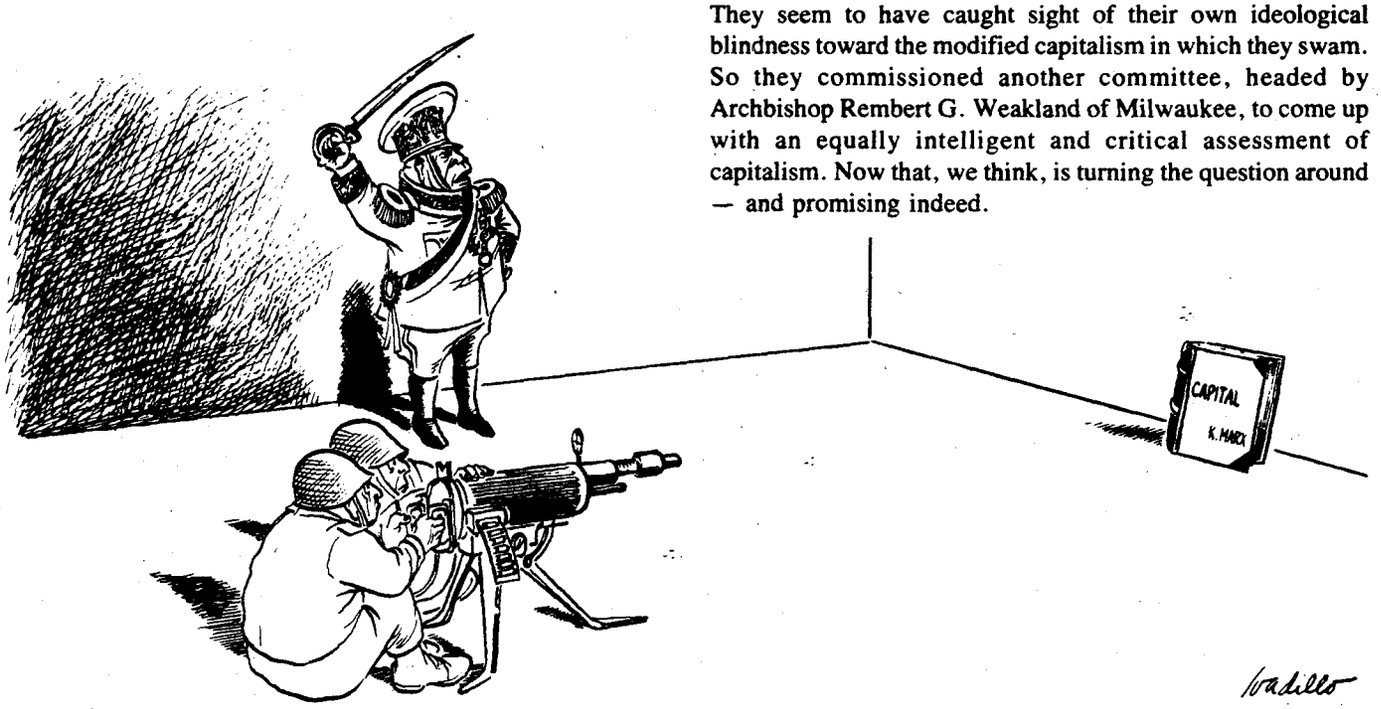
MARX OF THE CHURCH

The Jesuit superior general in Rome, Father Pedro Arrupe, has obviously had to deal for some time with the "Commie" slur against members of his order in Latin America. It's the common label, as he realizes, with which oligarchs and generals affix nearly anyone advocating social reform in the area. Last December he wrote a letter, just now published, setting down guidelines for the use of "Marxist analysis" in understanding social reality. His voice is calm, unfrightened. He encourages his men to maintain their own distinctive Christian identity, to keep a critical distance, but to continue their dialogue with Marxists. And while warning against the adoption of "Marxist analysis as a whole," Father Arrupe judges it fully appropriate to attend to those factors — the victimization of entire classes, class struggle, and ideologies which camouflage vested interests and injustice — that Marx's pioneering research in the British Museum disclosed as essential to a critical posture toward one's society and culture. For the conservatives in the Order and elsewhere, moreover, Arrupe also had a message. He warns them against construing his critical assessment of Marxism as a retreat from the Order's commitment to the cause of social justice. Moreover, he wants textbooks scrutinized lest they be inculcating the liberal capitalist world's "individualistic and materialistic vision of life that is destructive of Christian values and attitudes."

What is striking in this document is less the negative judgment on substantials of Marxist philosophy and politics — certainly no surprise there — but the degree to which the kind of social analysis pioneered by Marx is accepted as being in order for the Christian today, indeed demanded. For were Father Arrupe's letter to be expressed in positive terms rather than a series of reservations and cautions — perhaps meant as much for Vatican eyes as for Latin American ones — it might be taken as a case for incorporating a refined and revised version of Marx's class and ideological analysis as a basic component of the contemporary Christian's ordinary ascetical practice. That is, whereas in the older asceticism an individualistic examination of conscience was considered sufficient "purge" to set one on the way of illumination and union with God, this is no longer enough. What is now required, besides such self-scrutiny, is a systematic examination of one's social reality — and that means making use of those methods of seeing through ideology and social structure that Marx fathered in the Western intellectual tradition.

It was, of course, the great John Courtney Murray, who on the eve of his death, clearsightedly told younger Jesuits that the next generation's task would be to assimilate — and of course, thereby transmute — Marxism into the mainstream of the Catholic tradition. In much the same way Aristotle had been taken in during the thirteenth century. Quite obviously, the individual Christian cannot do this solo; it will require the kind of research only the university or think tank offers — and links between academe and retreat house and parish that are not yet forged.

Yet something is afoot. When the U.S. bishops met in Washington last November and endorsed a highly intelligent statement on Marxist Communism, they seemed to recognize that running through the list of Marxist fallacies was too easy. They seem to have caught sight of their own ideological blindness toward the modified capitalism in which they swam. So they commissioned another committee, headed by Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland of Milwaukee, to come up with an equally intelligent and critical assessment of capitalism. Now that, we think, is turning the question around — and promising indeed.



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A GOP FUTURE?

The 1980 election seems barely over, but politicos are not resting easy; the next campaign is already under way. The Republicans hold a 53-to-47 advantage in the Senate; the Democrats lead in the House 243-to-192. There is nothing the GOP would like better than to win control of the House in 1982, and its fund-raising efforts have been stressing the fact that a switch of only twenty-six seats would do just that. What are the Republican chances?

First the GOP disadvantages. Normally the party of a sitting president loses seats in Congress in any off-year election; this has been the consistent pattern in every off-year election since Franklin Delano Roosevelt's first term. It is also clear that the Republicans enjoyed distinct advantages last time around: Jimmy Carter was considered an affable but ineffective president by millions of voters across the country; the Iranian hostage issue re-erupted just before the election, opening old wounds over Mr. Carter's handling of the crisis; the Democratic administration had shown itself incapable of handling the economy and especially of checking inflation; candidate Carter concentrated funds and attention on his own personal political fortunes to the detriment of the traditional Democratic party machinery.

Democratic loyalists who want to sound an optimistic note like to point out all these factors. Things will be different in 1982, they say. But in saying this they tend to overlook certain other distinct advantages the Republicans now possess. One very important strength on the GOP side rests on the vast superiority of the Republican organization over that of the Democrats — in popular-level as opposed to fat-cat fund-raising, in the GOP's ability to target and appeal to selected groups of voters with special interests, in the GOP's superior ability to search out attractive potential candidates. The Democratic organization, on the other hand, is in a bad state of disrepair; its new chairman vows to set things right and match the GOP expertise, but accomplishing this by 1982 will take some doing.

Organizational superiority, then, is one big Republican advantage. Even more significant is the changing tide of voter opinion. Here the findings of a recent nationwide *New York Times*/CBS News poll are significant, supplying still more data to support growing Republican optimism. According to the poll, an increasing number of Americans from most population groups are calling themselves either Republicans or Republican-leaning independents. In January of 1980, fifty-three percent of those polled said they were Democrats or Democratic-leaning independents, while only thirty-three percent said they were Republicans or Republican-leaning independents. In the latest poll, the Democratic share had fallen to forty-nine percent; the Republicans had jumped eight points to forty-one percent. Similarly, among those who said without qualification that they belonged to one party or the other, the Democratic total had fallen from thirty-eight percent to thirty-four percent.

In short, the United States is becoming increasingly Republican, although it is becoming more conservative only on selected issues. (No increased support for a constitutional amendment allowing prayer in the public schools, for example, or for opposition to abortion; growing support for the claim that government had gone too far in interfering with business and the free enterprise system.) Democrats still outnumber Republicans, but the Democratic lead is only half as big now as it was when last year's presidential campaign began. It is too early to say for sure, but this poll and others suggest that a profound change may be underway in the nation's political climate — a change, says the *Times*, which may offer the GOP a chance to effect a classic political realignment comparable to that achieved by the Democrats under FDR in the '30s. Given this fact, plus a very personable and popular Republican president, the Democrats might be making a big mistake if they are overly optimistic about their prospects in 1982.

The press on El Salvador

VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE

EDITORIALISTS & THE ADMINISTRATION

ONE INDEX TO critical American sentiment about the Reagan-Haig policy toward El Salvador and one measure of the degree to which American opinion-makers have learned any "lessons of Vietnam" was the outpouring of editorials during February and March of this year. Complaints have recently been raised in several quarters—on the MacNeil-Lehrer Report, for instance, and in *The Nation* (April 25) and *The Columbia Journalism Review* (May-June)—that the U.S. press has fallen short in its coverage of El Salvador. However a survey of editorial opinion in thirty-eight widely diverse newspapers shows that an independent and skeptical eye is being cast on official U.S. policy.

To an overwhelming extent, these newspapers across the country—whether large, medium, or small in circulation; some dominant in metropolitan areas, some published in rural communities, some in the backwoods—disputed the administration's assumption that El Salvador's problems should be viewed primarily in terms of a global Soviet threat. Root cause of that tiny, tormented country's murderous present conflict is seen by most of the press as the unjust division of its wealth and resources and the long oppression of its poor.

The single point most frequently stressed in these editorials is that U.S. military aid ought to be conditioned specifically on containment of El Salvador's right-wing military forces as well as the leftist guerrillas and on continuation of needed internal reforms, political and economic. A great many also found it worrisome that the hurry to get additional arms to the

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Central American country seems to have obliterated U.S. concern about bringing to justice those who killed six U.S. citizens, the three nuns, one social worker, and two AFL-CIO agricultural advisers.

Also very striking in this cross section of press opinion is alarm at the U.S. "go it alone" approach. Washington, according to numerous papers, should have summoned together friendly and democratic-oriented countries within this hemisphere, such as Mexico and Venezuela, to search for an El Salvador peace that would serve that nation's people and hemispheric interests, not just U.S. interests. A total of twelve papers strongly urged mediation involving other nations and nine additional papers stressed the U.S. need to develop a long-range policy towards all of Latin America.

Many papers in this February-March sampling featured repeated editorials on the subject and forcefully argued that the wise U.S. policy would make this crisis the start of a new and constructive Latin American approach. "The U.S. has more choices than simply to back a military junta with arms shipments" said the *Stockton Record*, at the edge of California's rural Central Valley, a Mexican farmworker center. "U.S. policy at this juncture depends on a bi-polar view of world politics in which all countries are either pro-Soviet or pro-U.S." it said, and called this "a limited view of national interests."

Some papers suggested Canadian participation in peacemaking efforts; some pointed out that West Germany or Sweden or Europe's Socialist leaders might bring the leftist leadership to the bargaining table. A number proposed a multi-nation endeavor along the lines that resolved conflict in Zimbabwe. Papers that differed in their esteem for the administration's move such as the *Des Moines Register* (generally critical) and the *Chicago Tribune* (generally favorable) had in common the view that the Organization of American States should be involved in peace moves. "American finesse, not force is required" said the *Miami Herald*. The *Concord* (N.H.) *Monitor* urged consultation with other Central American nations, especially Mexico. The *Portland Oregonian* noted that Duarte seemed willing to meet with mediators, and urged the administration to pursue this opening. The Knight-Ridder paper, the *San Jose* (Calif.) *Mercury News* warned "President Reagan . . . risks alienating American friends in Latin America for no discernible strategic or economic gain."

Said the *Sacramento Bee* "Alarmist rhetoric based on simplistic East-West fears, without regard to the complex problems plaguing Central America, could create a situation neither we—nor they—can control. . . . The U.S. course . . . will require a delicate, difficult political solution involving those allies who best understand the situation: Mexico, Venezuela, Costa Rica . . . which have expressed a willingness to mediate. . . ."

The administration was not bereft of support. Among the thirty-eight papers, five unquestioningly endorsed not only the military aid but the attendant argument that framed this in terms of staving off global Communism. These five were: *San Diego Union; Wall Street Journal; Manchester*. (N.H.) *Union Leader; Princeton*, (Ill.) *Bureau County Record; New Haven* (Conn.) *Register*. Another six had some favorable responses to the administration's actions but were dubious about the "Cold War" approach or insistent that internal El Salvador reform not be neglected. All the rest raised serious questions or sharp criticism.

To what extent did this cross section of editorial opinion reflect some "lesson of Vietnam"? Although references were

IN THE CATHOLIC PRESS

EVEN MORE ON EL SALVADOR

EL SALVADOR FIGURES more prominently and more consistently in the Catholic press than in the secular dailies. Looking over numerous diocesan weeklies, one discovers, first of all, how vigorously many bishops have carried to their home bases the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' forthright condemnation of U.S. military aid to El Salvador. One of the most powerful statements to appear in any Catholic paper was made by San Francisco's Archbishop John R. Quinn after he returned from witnessing, in San Salvador, the savage assault on Archbishop Romero's funeral service. Also in San Francisco, the local Catholic press amply reported the support two Catholic bishops and an Episcopalian bishop gave a longshoremen's boycott of military cargo bound for El Salvador. The *Green Bay Catholic Compass*, like many other diocesan papers, gave special prominence to the demands of Archbishop John R. Roach of St. Paul-Minneapolis for "tough lines" to be taken with the El Salavador junta as a condition for aid. "Our problem with the centrist government," he said, "is that it is not centrist enough."

So it goes, randomly, every week. The *Tennessee Register* played prominently the account of Catholic missionaries' struggles in Latin America, given by Bishop Michael Murphy of Cork, Ireland, after he revisited Peru where he had served through the sixties. In Newark, New Jersey, *The Advocate* gave important space to a Seton Hall University "teach-in." When the American Friends Service, after completing a seventeen-member, two-month study-tour of Central America, expressed alarm at today's parallels with events in Vietnam, the story was reported in the Catholic press — but barely surfaced in secular papers.

Some consider dioceses heavily populated by Hispanics in California and the southwest particularly attentive to Latin American news. This is the view of Joan McCarthy, twelve years a missionary in Latin America and now commanding the Latin American desk for the San Francisco archdiocesan Commission on Social Justice. She notes the attention paid to El Salvador by *The Tidings* of Los Angeles, the San Bernadino *News Letter*, and *El Visitante*,

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made to obvious similarities, the surprise was that foreboding about Vietnam parallels was not the central feature of any editorial approach. It was mentioned, yes. "You worry us, Mr. Reagan," said the *Salt Lake Tribune*. "It all sounds reassuring—and so familiar. Remember?" said the *Louisville Courier Journal*. But the whole question of "Vietnamization" was submerged in the far more positive call for wholly different tactics by the administration.

Where the real "lesson of Vietnam" revealed itself was simply in the fact that the newspaper editorials had a more informed, more independent, and more assertive tone than most editorials on foreign policy before that unhappy Southeast Asian war. In fact they represent a new press attitude, independent and vigorously skeptical about national policy, and often forthright and brusque in criticizing it. This illustrates an accumulated change, many of the editorial writers

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the Spanish-language paper published in San Antonio, Texas. But cursory examination of a wide assortment of papers indicates interest is lively in dioceses remote from the Mexican border.

It is in news coverage, whether of events in El Salvador, local controversy over administration policy, or the background conditions in Latin America generally, that the Catholic press has stood out. *The Catholic Voice* of Oakland, California, for example, scooped dailies by obtaining a direct telephone interview with José Napoleon Duarte in which he labeled elections there as "the light at the end of the tunnel." As secular reporters have acknowledged, the church has been the principal witness to the exploitation of the poor in Latin America and the most reliable source of information about the real situation in strife-torn nations like El Salvador. While a number of Catholic magazines along with the *National Catholic Reporter* and missionary publications have led the way in telling the Latin American church's story, the diocesan weeklies have also done a noteworthy job.

As far back as 1972, when the Christian base communities were being established in Salvadoran parishes as a means of training Catholic lay leadership, reports about this effort and its frustrations reached Catholic readers in the U.S. So did allegations by the wealthy that village priests involved in such efforts were "Marxists." Later came the stories of "death-squad" disruptions of churches, schools, social centers—and then assassinations. Since 1977, eleven priests have been killed in El Salvador, in addition to Archbishop Romero, and some sixty priests expelled or forced to flee for their lives.

One diocesan editor who has visited and reported on El Salvador first hand, Fr. James Murphy of the *Sacramento Catholic Herald*, remarked on the consequence of such news. "When you have an archbishop known for his championship of the poor assassinated in the midst of saying Mass, and four religious women whose lives were dedicated to serving the poor wantonly murdered, a powerful message gets through to the American Catholic that his church is being persecuted. The reason becomes plain. It is the priority given the poor. This is having a profoundly unsettling effect on many Catholics who normally consider themselves conservative and backed President Reagan to regain conservative values. We can tell by the letters we get that this is altering previously conservative views." Then he added: "American Catholics are beginning to perceive what many in the church sense: that the center of Catholicism is moving away from Europe to Latin America with an ever-stronger emphasis on service to the poor."

Not all Catholic papers reflect these emphases in their reporting. For instance, the Twin Circle Publishing company's *National Catholic Register* usually centers upon news of the terrorist tactics on the left, and it shares administration alarms about Communist intrusion. There ripples through many letters from readers and through some editorials in diocesan papers a similar concern about Communist expansion in Latin America. But editor Dan Morris of the Oakland diocese *Catholic Voice* said he has not seen a single Catholic paper which actually endorses the Reagan administration's view of El Salvador as the appropriate place to confront the Soviets or which favors sending the junta arms.

The diocesan press has not hesitated to discuss El Salvador in editorials. The *Newark Advocate* reiterated Archbishop Romero's call for reforms without military means. *The Witness* of Dubuque, Iowa, lamented the U.S. military effort: "What a waste." Dollar for dollar, it said, economic development is worth more than military aid. In Boston, *The Pilot* shook its head in similar fashion over American emphasis on military measures, favoring a political solution instead: "Until the U.S. shows willingness to support social and structural change, all the arms and advisors will not bring peace and justice to a troubled people."

Editorials in diocesan papers, however, have generally not been as blunt and directly critical of administration policy as those in *NCR*, in Catholic journals like *Commonweal*, and in the daily secular papers. Yet there seems to be a growing firmness of tone. The *Sacramento Catholic Herald* has had three editorials lately opposing U.S. arms supplies to the junta and urging peace negotiations instead. In Los Angeles, *The Tidings* has had four editorials on El Salvador this year, questioning President Reagan's view that Duarte heads a "moderate" government, and questioning the wisdom of shipping arms to a government that lets its own people be decimated by paramilitary forces. The most forceful editorial asked for mediation and proposed the Vatican, the UN, or the OAS as mediators — but not the U.S., since it has foreign military personnel on Salvadoran soil.

MARY ELLEN LEARY

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themselves acknowledged, as a consequence of "feeling burned" first by an administration deceptive about Vietnam and then by an administration trapped in Watergate. The degree of change this constitutes in the American press was emphasized by Frances Fitzgerald, author of *Fire in the Lake*, when she wrote:

"Prior to the Vietnam War it rarely occurred to the press to question the government, especially on international relations. Now no newspaper any longer assumes the government is disclosing all the truth about a situation and none any longer assumes the government is being led by particularly brilliant people better informed than the rest of the nation."

It might be one thing to find such a coinciding pattern of views in the top half-dozen newspapers of widest circulation. But it is far more revealing of American attitudes to find this same pattern expressed all across the nation, often in papers of only 20,000 to 50,000 circulation, locally owned and highly conscious of community attitudes. A consensus emerges from the metropolitan dailies, from rural Massachusetts, Washington state lumber towns, mild-mannered Salt Lake City, Caribbean-attuned Miami, and Mexican-alert California.

Does it make a difference? Louis Wein, editorial writer of the *Everett* (Wash.) *Herald* said "I am confident that press attention and editorial reaction has surprised the administration and compelled it to take another look at what it's doing. What's critical now is for the press to stay with this story."

MARY ELLEN LEARY

(Mary Ellen Leary, a previous contributor, is a West Coast journalist and correspondent for Pacific News Service.)

Of several minds: *Thomas Powers*

IRON LAW OF INSTITUTIONS

THE PENTAGON PROVIDES A STRIKING EXAMPLE

WHY IS the world so hard to change? Once human institutions have a grip on life—once businesses are making money, churches have a congregation, bridges are collecting tolls, apartment towers are filled with tenants, charities are soliciting funds, ports are unloading cargo, government agencies are publishing regulations, armies are in the field—they acquire the momentum of anything alive, a tenacious instinct for survival, and a protective carapace more or less impervious to outside direction. Ideas abound for making things better; it is the stock in trade of a whole class of writers, academics, citizens restless with the humdrum of commerce, aspirants for public office. But the targets of reform do not surrender easily; they turn a deaf ear to the clamor without, and go their own sweet way. Since it is we—in the broadest sense—who create these institutions, why do we find it so difficult to change them?

A natural history of the reformer would probably describe a life cycle something as follows: in adolescence a vague sense of unease, a troubled feeling of difference. Why does everyone accept? Why do I resist? Followed by an unfolding conviction it is not I but the times and the things of this world which are out of joint. The reforming instinct, initially scattershot, begins to focus on one thing: *This* is the problem. Target and program tend to emerge together. The growing clarity of the latter can bring on a sense of euphoria: things don't have to be this way, the alternatives are so obvious, I can help carry the message.

At this point the world turns cussed. However powerful and cogent the message, it is soon apparent that words alone are not enough. Deep within the target institution some group of men appears to refuse to listen. A way must be found to bring the message to their very door, but alas, it is met there by expressions of sympathy, the explanation of difficulties, bland promises to consider, polite thanks for concern. (In some societies, of course, the reception of reformers is denunciation and arrest; it is liberal democracies I am talking about here. Our own country in fact.) The unhappy reformer is now torn by anger, despair, the heart-sinking prospect of the long march. Some practical way must be found to lend weight to the words. If the reformer is not to give up and go away, badly soured, he must turn dogged. The best do.

This is not to say nothing is ever accomplished. Much is accomplished. With all the tinkering it gets the machinery of society is rarely the same from one year to the next. But things do not change quickly, and above all they do not change much. The four great themes of reform in America over the last twenty years—civil rights, poverty, peace, and the environment—have been accompanied by loud noise and determined practical struggle. Much has been accomplished. I am not counseling despair. But for all the undeniable progress, who among us would fail to recognize his country? Little has been settled once and for all. Rights are still denied, people are poor, peace eludes us, the environment is sick and threatened. The great themes of reform of the last generation will be the great themes of the next. What gives the world its great power of resistance?

There are two ways one might answer this question. One is to take some specific target of reform—the failings of public education in the inner cities, say, as reflected in declining reading scores—and analyze the hell out of it. One thing connects to another and three hundred pages later we see where everything went wrong, starting with the arrival of the first African slave on a Virginia tobacco plantation. The other approach is to look for some more general explanation, something broadly inherent in human society, a kind of social law of momentum which would do for the world of men what physics does for the game of billiards.

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Naturally I have a theory. It is that no one is in charge. The workings of society are collective endeavors; human institutions, once established, have a life of their own. They have a nature and a temperament, a role and a means of livelihood. They are not immortal; they can prosper or sicken. Wise leaders can strengthen and foolish leaders weaken or kill them. But it is the nature and temperament of institutions which always comes first; to be explained they must be seen whole, with a changing roster of human servants whose nominal power is subject to the institution's will to go on doing what it does. Men create institutions for their own purposes; but once they have done so the institutions proceed autonomously—or with as much autonomy as they can assert or wangle—for *their* own purposes.

Let me illustrate with two ways of looking at New York City. One is to stand at the busy heart of it—in the midtown office district at Madison Avenue and 50th Street, for example. One is surrounded by mighty structures filled with bustling activity, the very image of human power and wealth. But who is in charge of these great buildings? Each one has an owner and a hierarchy of people in nominal control, but the ownership must always reside somewhere, and the people are expendable. From the janitors on up to the men who sit in the offices where the tax returns are signed, they are all just passing through. If they die they are replaced; if they fall below a minimum level of competence they are pushed out. The accountants who keep the books, the window cleaners, the tenants who pay rent, the men who clean the boiler, the lawyers who protest assessments are all servants of the whole. When a threat presents itself—a leak in the roof, a sudden rise in taxes, a tenant laggard with the rent, a manager with a drinking problem, a developer who wants to raze the building and replace it with something bigger still—the building rallies defenses as it can. To get one of these buildings down is quite a trick. As a general rule they make way only for something larger still, but assembling the necessary parcel of land in a city as dense as New York can take decades. Sometimes it can't be done at all—the existing structures are too well-defended—and the hopeful assemblers throw up their hands. When they succeed, the new, larger building is yet more permanently established.

It is the same with the enterprises which inhabit the buildings. Once they are going people no longer run but serve them. A paperboard manufacturing concern *wants to sell paperboard*. From the mail room to the board room selling paperboard is the order of the day. If the original owner grows weary of the enterprise he sells out. If a rival firm begins to press, the original company hires new salesmen. If costs go up prices are raised. If a union becomes too effective in winning its demands the firm may decamp to Georgia, where labor is cheap and wood pulp close to hand. Paperboard manufacturers are not immortal, but they do not commit suicide either. They may blunder into dissolution, or be overtaken by taxes, more efficient competitors, bad labor relations, the advent of plastic packaging and so on, but they go down fighting. Individuals lose heart but institutions have the blind tenacity of ant colonies.

One day in July, a few years ago, I flew in a small plane from Block Island to Flushing Airport in Queens. It was at the end of the day. We followed a beeline up Long Island into the setting sun. I was sitting in the front seat next to the pilot. I'd never looked out of the front of a plane before. At first the city was a dirty sulphurous smudge on the horizon, then a spiky ridge of great buildings in blue-grey silhouette. It was a stunning sight as we approached, a great unruly sprawl without border or definition, a lacework of big roads and little, bridges and canals and railroads. The buildings had a contour almost geological in effect, a surrounding plain of dwellings rising into foothills at local commercial centers, swelling into mountains as we approached the denser inner city, with abrupt peaks in the center and at the southern end of Manhattan. The sheer number of buildings was breathtaking, their range in type bewildering. The notion that anyone—even any group—actually *ran* the city was ridiculous. A city is not a thing but a group of things, each going its own way. What we call the city is the effect—the impression—of so many things, feeding and feeding off each other, going their own way in the same place.

"That comes to an even $10 billion for this project — batteries not included."

The most tenacious of human institutions are those of government. Perhaps this is to be explained by the nature of taxing authority. A government can draw money from all the lesser institutions within its reach. If some fail others prosper. Governments also have unique control over their own debt; they can dissolve it at will, over time, through control of the money supply. Inflation is a great eraser of obligation. But I don't want to pretend I understand economics. The general effect is clear enough in any event. A government is generally the very last institution of society to be subject to a failure to fund itself. This only reinforces the autonomy it shares with other human institutions.

I remember reading somewhere that Eisenhower's first and deepest shock on entering the White House was the discovery that a direct presidential order could evaporate before the ink of his signature was dry. He was accustomed to the military, where orders are obeyed or else. The executive branch of the government was a kind of sponge of authority; it just soaked up orders and went its way. On the surface it was all eagerness to please but down within was a core of autonomy, a kind of personality composed of method and purpose peculiar to itself. It was both patient and deaf. It was dead to charm and threats alike. Other presidents have been frustrated by, and sometimes remarked upon, the same thing. A president can make himself felt, but it's an uphill job.

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The usual explanation of this phenomenon is one word: bureaucracy. But that only suggests that reality. It is not individuals defending their perquisites which frustrate the programs of presidents and cabinet secretaries, but the very organs of government themselves. Each was founded with a purpose, a line of business, something it is supposed to do—collect taxes, run national parks, guarantee loans for low-income housing, build dams or highways, issue regulations to ensure safety in factories, publish pamphlets on home-canning, count the number of black people in basic industries, keep lists of dangerous radicals, maintain the price of cotton, buy desks and chairs, design bombs and missiles. Like the other institutions of society, the organs of government find it difficult to keep more than one idea at a time.

The Pentagon offers a particularly strong example of this single-minded autonomy. Its job is to purchase weapons and maintain a standing army, navy and air force. The basic work is highly compartmentalized, and each sub-office displays the single-minded autonomy of the whole. The Ballistic Missile Office of the Air Force designs missiles at Norton Air Force Base in San Bernardino, California. It has been doing this, under one name or another, for twenty-five years. The turnover in the uniformed personnel is extraordinary; a veteran of three years is considered an "old head."

But the turnover does not interrupt the continuity of BMO's work. The MX missile has been in some stage of design or development since the 1960s. BMO, the Air Force, and the Pentagon want to build a new missile, and now, after years of false starts and transient indifference in high places, it looks as if they are going to build it. Other cells of the Pentagon want to build Trident submarines, new tanks, tactical aircraft, nuclear weapons in a wide range of yields, sophisticated communications gear, and so on. The individuals passing through these cells are sometimes passionate, sometimes tepid. Some are able, some duffers. Secretaries of Defense pay strict attention one year, ignore them the next. One Congress balloons their funding, while another cuts it back. These are only ripples on the surface. The basic work goes on. If anyone doubts its effect over the long term he need only conduct an inventory. The International Institute for Strategic Studies in London does this every year, not only for the United States. What they report is a lot of everything.

Consider how well-defended is the Pentagon. In one sense it is shielded from direct physical interference by the entire armed might of the United States, which in turn is funded by a quarter of the national budget generated from heavy taxes on the world's largest economy. But it is equally well-protected from indirect threats. A large corps of public information officers promotes its point of view. It has well-established relations with Congress which not even the White House can interrupt. Its purpose is shared by many large corporations, which are themselves well-seeded with alumni of the Pentagon. When one of them suffers a crisis of faith, as sometimes happens, he does not last long.

The final, broadest and deepest line of Pentagon defense is the belief, several thousand years old, that arms provide security. Arrayed against the Pentagon is a tiny handful of frail groups, funded on comparative shoestrings, with an alarmed sense that the Pentagon, having prepared for war on such a stupendous scale, is eventually going to get it. There's much to be said for this point of view, but much to be said on the other side as well, and legions to say it. Is it any wonder that mere words only ping off the carapace? Barring a change of heart—and what words could achieve that?—it will go on doing what it does until it meets something bigger than itself.

THOMAS POWERS

Of several minds: *John Garvey*

THE GNOSTICS AMONG US

WHY IS THIS HERESY SUDDENLY SO INTERESTING?

WE ORDINARILY make a sharp distinction between belief and non-belief, perhaps allowing for gray territories in between. Maybe the division should be done differently, between those who are easy in their belief or non-belief, and those who see agony in either place. In this sense Madalyn Murray O'Hair and Jerry Falwell have a lot in common; so do Pascal and Camus. The great questions are the ones conventional believers and non-believers are often relaxed about. Does the fact that we are alive matter? What evidence do we have for a loving God — for that matter, what evidence is there that God is even vaguely decent?

In *The Gnostic Gospels* (Vintage, $2.95) Elaine Pagels quotes Tertullian on "the questions that make people heretics": Where does humanity come from, and how? Where does evil come from, and why? The heresy which worried Tertullian was gnosticism, which is suddenly of interest again, largely because of the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library, a collection of gnostic writings which has now been translated and is available in English (*The Nag Hammadi Library*, James M. Robinson, Harper & Row, $16.95). Gnosticism was a rich system of thought, one finally antithetical to orthodoxy. It was named for the teaching that one must be initiated into a *gnosis*, a knowing, in order to share the divine life. A central perception of this esoteric approach to Christianity is that the way most people see things is illusory. Gnosticism compares the ordinary human condition to a state of dreaming or drunkenness; enlightenment is a process of waking, or sobering up. One implication of this is that deception must be built into the fabric of the universe itself. This is where orthodox Christianity and Judaism most clearly parted ways with gnostic systems of thought, which taught that the god responsible for creation was

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fallen, deranged, or downright evil.

Elaine Pagels's *The Gnostic Gospels* won the National Book Critics Circle Award, was serialized in the *New York Review of Books*, and was attacked by several orthodox reviewers — what more could you want? There are problems with the book: Pagels acknowledges the fact that gnosticism was more elitist than orthodoxy, but does not seem to find this terribly problematic. And she makes a mistake in a discussion of the possible influence of Buddhism on gnostic thought. Pagels cites Edward Conze, a Buddhist scholar, who writes, "Buddhists were in contact with the Thomas Christians (that is, Christians who knew and used such writings as the *Gospel of Thomas*) in South India." Conze is indeed a respectable source, but I think he is wrong here. Thomas Christians are a monophysitic Eastern church which to my knowledge has nothing to do with the Gospel of Thomas. But *The Gnostic Gospels* is, on the whole, an exciting book, and it makes sense for Pagels to point out the connection between gnosticism and later people who wrestled with the meaning of Jesus's life and death, people like Blake, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky.

Gnosticism is important to William Irwin Thompson's *The Time Falling Bodies Take To Light* (St. Martin's Press, $14.95). Thompson is an engaging writer whose excitements and insights take in whole millennia. He loves finding the patterns in history which a sensitive reading of myth can illuminate; in fact he loves this so much that he may spot a few patterns which aren't there at all. Some of his interpretations of prehistoric religion and culture stretch imagination about as far as it can go. But Thompson would defend the historian's right to exercise a kind of poetic license where facts are so thin that some imagining is necessary if we are to say anything about the period at all. Thompson uses myth to illuminate culture and sexuality, and tries to make out the pattern of the age ahead of us. In the process he does a nice job of showing up the narrowness of such thinkers as Carl Sagan and E. O. Wilson; he is particularly good at revealing the ways in which their scientism is a primitive form of myth, a reversal on the theme of rationalists who take myth to be a primitive form of science.

Thompson acknowledges his fascination with gnosticism. Like the gnostics he stresses the need for initiation into the knowledge that will save us. Most of his allusions to Jesus and to scripture are to the gnostic Jesus and to such gnostic works as *The Gospel of Thomas*. And like the gnostics he sees the ordinary existence of human beings as a form of delusion and imprisonment: "The Resurrection of the Body means that one is able to carry into the heavenly realm the wisdom of the Fall into time . . . The angels remain with God the Father and do not fall into an animal body in physical time and space, but when a human being is able to liberate his consciousness from that physical entrapment and reascend to the heavenly realm he is honored almost above the angels."

Gnosticism is the major theme of Philip K. Dick's *Valis* (Bantam, $2.25). Dick is one of the best science fiction writers. It is not his best novel; it is, perhaps, too close to home. Much of the book is based on Dick's own experiences with dope, failed marriage, the deaths of friends, and suicide. Underlying all of these experiences is a fierce demand that God show his face. A gnostic God finally does, using a rock group, ancient conspiracies, a divine child, and a movie so loaded with gnostic significance that it looks like a schizophrenic's picture of the universe, where everything works together to prove the madman's point: "In Valis nothing was a coincidence." In a strange appendix Dick offers an interpretation of the world which is decidedly gnostic: "We did not fall because of a moral error; we fell because of an intellectual error: that of taking the phenomenal world as real . . . And creation is a language and nothing but a language, which for some inexplicable reason we can't read outside and can't hear inside . . . Since the universe is actually composed of information, then it can be said that information will save us. This is the saving *gnosis* which the Gnostics sought. There is no other road to salvation."

What has made gnosticism suddenly interesting to people looking for answers? It could be that orthodox Christianity seems too much at ease with itself, in a time when ease is not called for. At the end of her book Elaine Pagels raises a question which gnosticism poses: "What is the source of religious authority? For the Christian the question takes more specific form: what is the relation between the authority of one's own experience, and that claimed for the Scriptures, the ritual, and the clergy?" This was a question raised by gnosticism, and it has recurred periodically. The question of genuine religious authority is at the center of all the books discussed here. Another reason for the attraction of gnosticism could be its answer to the mystery of evil. In reviewing Karl Adam's *The Spirit of Catholicism* George Orwell wrote that Adam hurried by the problem of evil the way a man hurries past a creditor's doorway. That may not be fair to Adam, but it has too often been the response of orthodox Christianity to a question which exists as the tormenting center of many lives.

Gnosticism has been called a perennial heresy, a natural turn taken by the questing mind. We live in a universe which makes it possible for many people to believe that whoever is responsible for our being here is deranged. Our hearts tell us that God must be good; much of our experience tells us that whatever rules the universe is not good. One can respond to this terrible bind by giving up on the question, but plainly a lot of people have not. The popularity of Pagels's book is an indication of that. The conclusion of *The Gnostic Gospels* raises problems which have not been given enough consideration by institutionalized Christianity. Thompson simply assumes that orthodox Christianity has little to say to his concerns, a point on which I think he is wrong; but he didn't reach that point without help from orthodox Christianity. *Valis* is a desperate, sad, and moving book which reveals needs and hopes ordinary religion does not deal with in any adequate way. All of these books manifest a need which is not being met by conventional religion; but it is a profoundly religious need, and the questions which are involved matter deeply.

JOHN GARVEY

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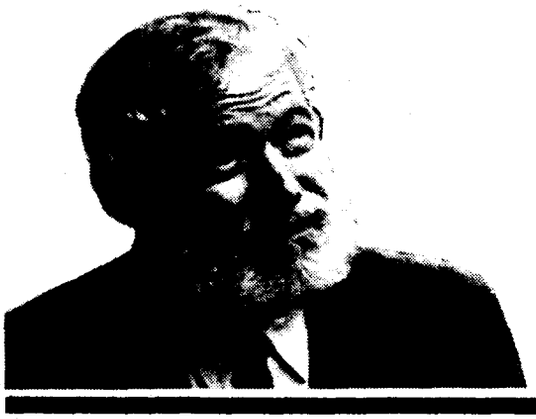

Hemingway alive

SAUL MALOFF

"HE WAS," Archibald MacLeish wrote of Hemingway, "one of the most human and spiritually powerful creatures I have ever known. The only other man who seemed to me to be as much *present* in a room as Ernest was FDR, and I am not excepting Churchill." That's the sort of man MacLeish could be, decent in his bones, even if he wasn't much of a poet and still less of a playwright. Hemingway wrote to a friend of MacLeish: "He's gotten . . . a goddamned bore. Righteous, fussy, and a bloody bore. Strange mixture of peurility [*sic*—quite enough has been written about EH's spelling and other epistolary eccentricities] and senility . . . too bloody pompous. I shouldn't write this. So forget it . . . I wouldn't want to hurt his bloody feelings for anything. So tear this part out and burn it" (*Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters 1917-1961*. Edited by Carlos Baker. Scribners, $27.50, 948 pp.). Sort of man Hemingway could be, a bastard in his bones, though at his best he could be one hell of a writer.

But to say that of Hemingway is to muddy the record and in a way to play his game. As a man he was manysided; and as a writer he still presents a problem for critical assessment, a major and greatly perplexing one. The immensely influential style and manner left a permanent imprint on American fiction, no doubt of it — both for good and ill; yet so little of the total body of work remains fixed in the canon of American literature. Now, twenty years after his death, and how many more years after his literary death, just as we think we have him well and truly buried, here he is again, violently, rampantly, disconcertingly alive in the much-delayed publication of some six hundred out of the perhaps seven thousand letters he wrote between 1917 when he lay wounded in a Red Cross hospital in Milan, mad about war and in love with the 122 fragments of shrapnel embedded in his flesh, and 1961 when he wrote touchingly to the nine-year-old son of his doctor three weeks before his death. No, not death, he didn't merely die; and how we all take special pains to say this, as if it were a debt we owed him: before he went downstairs very early that morning in Ketchum, Idaho, and put both barrels of the Boss shotgun to his head and, holding the gun butt securely to the floor, blew away his entire cranial vault. He was a journalist before he was a novelist and he staked his honor on such things.

His feeling about truth-telling and accuracy was certainly as much moral as literary. With Edmund Wilson he was furious for many reasons over many years, not least because he was convinced that Wilson's research was shoddy, careless, inaccurate; though as so often with Hemingway (and the rest of us) one must judge how that weighed against other motives, for example, Wilson's insufficient regard for his, Hemingway's, work, and his, Hemingway's, contempt for the non-combatant Wilson (and nearly everyone else who did not fight in the War — some war, any war). Wilson, he was certain, was bent on "putting me out of business" as a writer and equally bent on maliciously "knifing" Scott Fitzgerald in the public prints whenever he could.

OF COURSE Hemingway's base talent for venomous ridicule and abuse of an incomparable nastiness is well known in general — from the biographies and his own books, very much including the posthumous *A Moveable Feast*; and now seen in its most undeliberated, spontaneous form it still makes good wintry reading. One by one they fall: Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson, Max Eastman, the Sitwells, the later Dos Passos, Thomas Wolfe, Steinbeck, the list is endless and unsparing. Of his deadly mother he could say in so many words, in a letter to Charles Scribner: ". . . I hate her guts and she hates mine" — for no better reason, such is filial ingratitude, than that she drove his father to suicide, or so he believed, and would do the same to him if he permitted it. For Max Eastman (the background is recounted at length and in bloody detail in Carlos Baker's authorized biography) he had ". . . an ambition to nail that son of a bitch to the top of a fence post with a twenty penny spike through the base of his you know what and then push him backwards slowly." And of its

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kind this is one of his gentler sentiments.

Yet he could also be loving and tender — in fact moistly, openly sentimental, not surprising in this most sentimental of writers, this writer who confidently supposed he had constructed the literary means of containing and suppressing sentiment. Tenderly loving as brother, son (selectively) and grandson, friend, husband, father — when he wasn't being hardboiled, a man's man and soldier's soldier, aficionado of the dance of death, friend to toreros and matadors, hunting and fishing comrade to others likeminded — those swaggering, hairychested, tiresome, quite unconvincing roles with which he is innocently associated by the gulls, often but by no means only media gulls, taken in by his public posturing. ("Because I am very shy," he said, "I drink sometimes to make people bearable.") On the very next instant he could write movingly of Fitzgerald that he "loved him very much" and with the sweet understanding bred of love say to his and Scott's editor and friend Maxwell Perkins: "It was a terrible thing for him to love youth so much that he jumped straight from youth to senility without going through manhood. . . . I wish we could help him."

For anyone still taken in by those other, contrary, combative stories so long in circulation, Hemingway provides the best and most persuasive accounting. In an earlier letter to Perkins he asks to have his "great affection" conveyed to Scott and adds: "I always had a very stupid little boy feeling of superiority about Scott — like a tough little boy sne ng at a delicate but talented little boy." Almost the only writer of stature whom he didn't see as the competition, a rival in need of being bested — either among his contemporaries or among the great "deads" as he called the masters, they being the likes of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Melville no less — was Scott; in the case of his sad and fragile friend, affection and pity, fraternal or paternal love, outweighed envy, though he knew better than anyone else exactly how good (so good, he wrote Perkins, it was frightening) Scott could be, and also how bad (so bad it could break your heart). "Scott died inside himself at around the age of thirty to thirty-five," he wrote Perkins, "and his creative powers died somewhat later."

Not the smallest gift conferred by this autobiography-in-letters is that now, finally, we may put to rest all further psychobabble about the "hidden wound," that old canard and darling of thesis-mongering psychoanalytic critics Reichian and Freudian — the genital wound supposedly incurred on the Italian front and later surfacing as Jake Barnes's most melancholy condition in *The Sun Also Rises* and elsewhere in his work. The supposition was fashionable and influential though it is founded in a naive confusion of art and life. Infection of the scrotum, happily entirely treatable and curable, while hardly amounting to castration, is close enough to concentrate the mind wonderfully, and being hospitalized along with many actual cases of radical genital damage can make a young man think very hard about ultimate matters. It may also lead eventually to the making of the landmark novels by which we tell time and distance. "Invention is the finest thing," as he wrote Scott in another connection — in fact while castigating him for certain improbabilities in *Tender Is the Night*, "but you cannot invent anything that would not actually happen."

A brief sampling cannot hope to impart more than a suggestion of the richness, scope, variety, and force as well as the limitations, defects, blindness, and craziness of the letters. A man lives in them; they're alive with the power of his presence. Just when we thought he was dead and gone, buried and forgotten, here he is again, pounding on the door, beating it down.

AUTHOR & READER AT THE SAME TIME

Walt Whitman, poet of democracy

JORGE LUIS BORGES

ONLY ONCE did I meet the great Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. I had gone to his home where we both began discussing literature extensively. Gradually I noticed that on the desk in Neruda's study there was a bust of Walt Whitman, and in fact, this was the only bust of a writer in Neruda's home. So I asked him, "Have you been influenced greatly by Whitman?"

"Whitman has been my greatest teacher," he replied, "and I, myself, am a direct disciple of his."

Whitman's influence over Neruda was not unique because the nineteenth century American poet has influenced all Spanish-American poets, and I believe all of them owe something to Whitman. And that he continues to exercise influence, more than other poets, on all of world literature.

JORGE LUIS BORGES is the Argentine poet, critic, and short story writer. The above article was transcribed and translated by Inter-American News Services, Inc.

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Myself, I wrote my book *Fervor de Buenos Aires* under the direct influence of Walt Whitman and wrote that in the book's prologue. In my opinion, Whitman is the father of all that is modern in poetry.

From that moment in 1855 when he published his *Leaves of Grass* and invented blank verse—based on the Psalms, of course, but very different from them—from that moment, the poetic personage has become one of the greatest feats of the North Americans and their literature. Inspired by experiences in the bedrooms of New Orleans and on Georgian battlefields it has been essential for the literatures of every continent.

The literary destiny of Whitman's followers has been, above all else, to imitate the results of his work, that somewhat popular poetry, that tone that causes him to be less a poet than an orator. But no one has thought about the intimate aspects of Whitman's experiment. That dream of democracy, what Americans call "the American dream," was the great dream of Whitman, who believed fervently in the possibility of that experiment. He was a great partisan of democracy and he wanted the hero of his poem to be everyone.

Now then, there was always a hero in epic poetry; Vergil said, "I sing of arms, deeds, and the man"; that is to say, a man is chosen and exalted. Heroes like Achilles, Ulysses, Roland, and El Cid are some examples.

Everyone was the hero of Whitman's poem since he wrote it in relation to democracy, in relation to an ideal of equality among all men on earth. He invented a personage whom he called "Walt Whitman" who was not the one offered to us by his biographers; a lonely, unhappy man who led a sad life. Instead the other Whitman, the Whitman of the poem, is a sort of magnificent vagabond who travels from no man's land to the land of everyone.

Does that mean, then, that there are two Whitmans, the friendly savage and the poor, solitary writer, who invented him?

There is more than duality, there is a trinity of Whitmans. In the first place he is the newspaperman of the *Brooklyn Eagle*. Then he becomes the exalted personage in the poem, "Walt Whitman, a cosmos, son of Manhattan, turbulent, carnal, sensual, eating, drinking, engendering." And finally, the third personage is the reader himself which is why when we read *Leaves of Grass* we identify ourselves immediately with him.

Now then, the idea of creating a trinity one of whose parts is the reader himself, is an idea that only Whitman has attempted and that no one has thought of imitating, Whitman's style, his intonation, and literary methods have been imitated by Neruda, Carl Sandburg, Lee Masters, and others. But none of them created a personage who would be the author and the reader at the same time. Of course, perhaps only a genius such as Whitman could achieve it, and when one reads Whitman, one immediately understands that he is truly in the presence of a genius.

The democratic personage invented by him is marvelous; one feels that the one who speaks isn't Whitman but the reader himself. In the poem "Salut de Monde," for example, he says, "What do you see, Walt Whitman? What do you hear, Walt Whitman?" And among the things he sees is the cowboy crossing the plains with a lasso on his arm, that is to say, he sees "us," his nineteenth century American audience, in some way. And Whitman also speaks to the one who will read him a hundred years from now, and he imagines that the one who reads him would have wanted to be with him personally, and so he says, "And in all likelihood we are together, you and I."

"These are, in truth, the thoughts of all men, in all places, and at all times," sings Whitman, and *Leaves of Grass* is the song of a great individual who is of and belongs to all people, men and women. It is a song of joy because, unlike Baudelaire and Byron who dramatized their unhappiness in famous volumes, Whitman dramatized his happiness. And when Whitman achieves beauty, he achieves it as no else does: "I am man," he says, "I suffered, I was there." What beauty! Those verses fall like hammer blows.

NOW, DOES Whitman's poetry, more than a literary attitude, represent a form of expression of humanistic-religious truth?

Yes, because there is a mystical feeling evident in his poetry, an experience which supposedly corresponded with his stay in the South. Because whatever it was—the love for a woman, an erotic experience that for him was mystical, perhaps—afterwards he changed radically. Whitman until then was a mediocre journalist who had written a novel against alcoholism and partisan political articles including, strangely enough, a tract in support of slavery. He was, as can be seen, just a journalist. But then he traveled to the South, I think he lived there a couple of years, and returned to New York where he wrote *Leaves of Grass* which changed everything.

He sent a copy to Emerson, who was already famous, and Emerson answered him with a very generous letter saying that *Leaves of Grass* was the greatest work of intelligence and wisdom that America had so far contributed. And Emerson continued, "I travel little to New York, but when I do go I shall not miss the occasion to shake the hand of my benefactor."

And I, too, agree with Emerson because I think that Walt Whitman is a benefactor of all mankind.

Later Whitman published that letter in an edition of erotic poems which caused a great scandal at the time, and this caused a misunderstanding between Emerson and his "benefactor." Emerson had advised Whitman to exclude the erotic theme. And Whitman answered him, "If I exclude sex, I have to exclude everything."

Whitman was right but he was also audacious because he dared publish his erotic poetry in the Puritan America of 1855 and so his total image suffered for it. Poor Whitman! Apparently he sent out letters with false signatures to the newspapers pointing out that *Leaves of Grass*, despite its clumsiness and the fact that it was written by an uncultured man, was nonetheless a work of genius. He had to do that, and it is understandable that he did it because, as I said, he was an unfortunate creature who was alone.

Of course he wasn't America's only genius at that time

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because Poe, to whom we also owe so much, was a contemporary of Whitman. Poe and Whitman didn't know each other and I think it was better that way. They surely would not have been able to get along. They were opposites.

Poe died without knowing Whitman's poetry but he would have surely thought Whitman's poetry was written in blank verse because Whitman was very stupid and could not write in classical verse form. And as for the themes, they, too, would have been distasteful to him: the theme of democracy and common everyday life no doubt would have seemed repulsive to Poe.

Whitman, on the other hand, never understood Poe either. He knew Poe through his works, and when the latter died, he was somewhat unjust to him. Whitman published an article saying that Poe was good, but that he was like a pianist who struck only the most majestic notes without portraying North American democracy. This Poe never proposed to do, since he was at heart a rather dissolute aristocrat and a great romantic.

But perhaps the great difference between Poe and Whitman or, for that matter, Whitman and many other poets and writers, is that the debt we owe Poe is due more to his total image than to any story. When we think of Byron, for example, we think less about "Don Juan" or "Childe Harold" than we do about his person. And when we think of Poe we think of his person, that kind of macabre dandy.

With Whitman we think, as I said before, of an orator of joy, and so the great North American poet has become overwhelmed by his creation. His experiment with the trinity of personage in *Leaves of Grass* was so successful that his own person has been obscured; the vision of a lonely, unfortunate man whose life was short of happiness has been replaced by a species of semi-divine hero espousing democracy. And it has been Whitman's successful leap into his songs, the recreation of "Walt Whitman," that makes his *Leaves of Grass* the poetry of genius.

Screen

RAZING CAIN

THE SHOCK OF AMORALITY

THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE is perhaps the best thing James M. Cain ever wrote. Certainly the novel's opening, where Frank and Cora are getting acquainted, is Cain at the top of his form. Frank is a drifter who has just been hired by Nick Papadakis to work in the gas station attached to Nick's restaurant, and Cora is Nick's wife. Frank tells us all about it in his own words:

> Then I saw her. She had been out back, in the kitchen, but she came in to gather up my dishes. Except for the shape she really wasn't any raving beauty, but she had a sulky look to her, and her lips stuck out in a way that made me want to mash them in for her.
>
> * * *
>
> She was so close I could smell her. I shot it right close to her ear, almost in a whisper. "How come you married this Greek, anyway?"
>
> She jumped like I had cut her with a whip. . . .
>
> I went out. I had what I wanted. I had socked one in under her guard, and socked it in deep, so it hurt. From now on, it would be business between me and her. She might not say yes, but she wouldn't stall me.
>
> * * *
>
> She looked at me, and got pale. She went to the swinging door, and peeped through. Then she went into the lunchroom, but in a minute she was back. . . .
>
> I took her in my arms and mashed my mouth up against hers. . . . "Bite me! Bite me!"
>
> I bit her. I sunk my teeth into her lips so deep I could feel the blood spurt into my mouth. It was running down her neck when I carried her upstairs.

And at this point we're only on page six!

Today, almost fifty years after Cain wrote *Postman*, you still couldn't top it for sheer raunchiness. All you can do is make it more explicit. At first I thought that that was all Bob Rafelson had done in his new adaptation of the Cain classic. In the movie's version of the last scene quoted above, for instance, Frank (Jack Nicholson) doesn't carry off Cora (Jessica Lange) like a caveman retiring discreetly to the cave. He throws her right on the kitchen table, where we get to watch them groping and pawing one another while he tries to mount her. This hardly represents progress in the arts when compared to the Cain original. But I suppose I would have to admit it's an advance over the earlier Hollywood adaptation, which was done in the mid-1940s at MGM with John Garfield and Lana Turner.

The MGM version is so wholesome it's almost a perversion of Cain. We know that Cain is in trouble as soon as the credits begin, because the copy of the novel seen in the background is in fact not Cain's slight, trashy pulp fiction, but a massive tome, something at least as epic and pretentious as *Gone with the Wind*. Our worst suspicions are confirmed the first time we lay eyes on Turner in the role of Cora. Instead of Cain's mussy nymphomaniac, Turner is an icy goddess. As Garfield sits at the counter of the diner, a lipstick rolls across the floor. He retraces its path to the feet of Turner, who, as his eyes slowly ascend her, is wearing white high heels, white shorts, a white sweater, and an immaculate white turban.

(When this film was made, America's erotic ideal was still the pin-up, that flossy memory of sex which had accompanied American servicemen overseas. There desire for women who were out of reach had to be both kept alive and kept in bounds. The pin-up's message was: Look, but don't touch — you might mess my hair, or smudge my lipstick. It is in that tradition that Turner is working when she drops her lipstick the first time Garfield sees her. Nothing could be further from Cain.)

So the scene where Nicholson grab-asses Jessica Lange in the new *Postman* may represent progress over the Turner-

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Garfield rendition of the novel. But it's only progress of an impersonal, historical sort, the sort that also makes quartz watches an advance over stem-winders. Like the new watches, the new movie is a bit more accurate. That's all. If explicitness were the best that Rafelson and scriptwriter David Mamet could do, *Postman* would hardly have been worth their while to remake, or worth ours to go and see. It turns out that the movie is not merely trying to outdo Cain, however, nor is it content just to be obvious about sex in the ways now obligatory in movies. In some ways, surprisingly, the film is more restrained than Cain's novel. Even in that first torrid scene, in spite of the explicitness, the film is beginning to soften the relationship between Frank and Cora that Cain created.

The film avoids altogether some of Cain's most lurid touches, like the bite Frank takes out of Cora's lip in the novel. What Rafelson and Mamet substitute are scenes that go in the opposite direction, toward a kind of antic domesticity. At one point in the movie, Cora comes back from visiting her husband in the hospital and finds Frank up to his elbows in egg salad. He's frantically trying to make sandwiches for an entire troop of Cub Scouts which has hiked by for lunch. This sort of thing is typical of the slight and, ultimately, subtle changes the film has made in the novel. Their cumulative effect is to turn Cain's sensationalism into a more credible love story.

The effect is also to restore to Cain's story some of the shock value it otherwise loses with today's jaded audiences. Cain had some blunt things to say about the relationship between sex and violence. He made the passion between Frank and Cora strong enough to include murdering Cora's husband Nick. The violence in their love-making leads directly to the violence they do Nick, as we see when, having bludgeoned him to death, they are so turned on that they go at it in the bushes by the scene of the murder. But once their desperation and their lust have gone that far, they have placed themselves beyond the pale as far as Cain is concerned. He is, in the end, a very moral novelist, one who believes in retribution. After they have murdered Nick, Frank and Cora are fated, doomed characters. The atmosphere of their relationship becomes inescapably gothic. Eventual catastrophe seems inevitable.

In Rafelson's movie, this isn't the case. On the contrary, as they suffer through their trial for murder and other tribulations, they are drawn together in such a way that, at the end, the movie has turned into a romance. They're just a couple of kids who, it happened, had to murder her husband in order to find happiness. They're so close to happiness at the end, and so charming together, that we find ourselves rooting for them. Theirs turns out to be a real Depression love story. We're quite resentful when tragedy at last strikes, after all they've been through. For things to turn out this way seems not inevitable, as in the novel, but arbitrary. This is more shocking than anything ever dreamt of in Cain's philosophy.

COLIN L. WESTERBECK, JR.

Books: THREE INSIDERS, ONE OUTSIDER

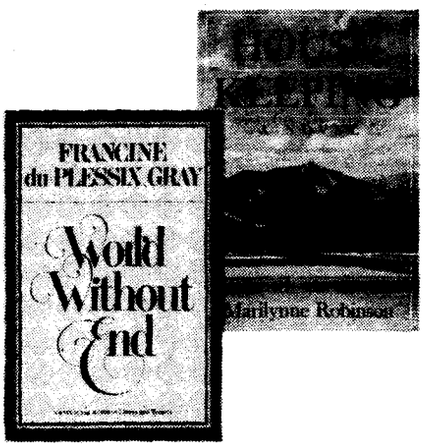
WORLD WITHOUT END

Francine duPlessix Gray

Simon and Schuster, $12.95, 320 pp.

Doris Grumbach

IF ONE were given to reviewing by bestowing genre-labels one might call Francine Gray's second novel (her first was the highly-regarded *Lovers and Tyrants*, 1976) a prime entry in the novel of intelligence. It is just that: the lives she tells about ring with authenticity for their times and their place. The three who are her heroes love each other and are held together by their participation in all the artistic, intellectual, religious, and psycho-sexual movements of the American twentieth century. They move across continents and hemispheres of class, national origins, poverty, success, dissatisfaction, and rebellion against the present and the inherited past, thus involving a complete contemporary culture in their lives.



Most of the action is composed by the lives of two women and a man. Edmund Richter (called Eddem, a pet name, for everyone in the novel has a pet name) is an émigré whose great love is the beautiful and eccentric Mara, his mother. His

(Continued on page 308)

HOUSEKEEPING

Marilynne Robinson

Farrar Straus Giroux, $10.95, 219 pp.

Rosemary Booth

I thought. Sylvie is nowhere, and sometime it will be dark. I thought. Let them come unhouse me of this flesh, and pry this house apart. It was no shelter now. . . .

SELFHOOD AND shelter have had an intimate association in literature. Rebuffed by his daughters, Lear rejects the protection of their dwellings and seeks exposure to a storm in order to construct a new self. The desolate individual at the end of T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" finds self-reassurance in the act of building—"These fragments I have shored against my ruins. . . ." In each case the notion of shelter is linked with an

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inner effort to forge a new self.

In her first novel, *Housekeeping*, Marilynne Robinson has exploited this familiar connection, immersing it in a story as riveting and taut as the plunge of a train from bridge tracks into lakewater below, the book's primal and haunting incident. While its homely title suggests domesticity, such a connotation is askew of the novel's design, which limns personal preservation as much as household maintenance, private as well as familial order. Yet the two themes are fundamentally inseparable, and "house" here *is* the self, product of toil and prey to destruction. In the end, both literal and figurative houses are intentionally destroyed, but out of ashes and dissolution a new self and life emerge. For the protagonist in *Housekeeping* is not everywoman but an uncommon girl, observant and withdrawn by habit. Like an artist, she will finally take up residence on the outskirts of society, "keeping" her self by maintaining a marginal vantage point. She will be on the outside looking in, an advantaged perspective: "When one looks from inside at a lighted window, or looks from above at the lake, one sees the image of oneself in a lighted room, the image of oneself among trees and sky — the deception is obvious, but flattering all the same. When one looks from the darkness into the light, however, one sees all the difference between here and there, this and that."

The underlying pilgrimage that impels the novel is nevertheless an ordinary one, the journey to self-consciousness or maturity. *Housekeeping* is an elementary book in another sense too, in that it is steeped in images of earth, water, air, and fire, which suffuse even minor details of each episode. For example, after a storm, "the couch and the armchairs were oddly dark. The stuffing in their backs had slid, and the cushions had shallow craters in the middle of them. Water seeped out when we touched them. In the course of days the flood had made a sort of tea of hemp and horsehair . . ."

Clarity and precision mark every level of writing in this work: its stark narrative incidents; its economical character portraits; and its spare tones of language. Though they are restrained, however, the details nonetheless resonate, as captured wildflowers are said to be "rare things which grew out of ants' nests and bear dung and the flesh of perished animals," or blown snow is termed "drifting, as placeless as smoke." And the dual figures of glacial lake and railroad bridge are always evident.

Housekeeping is the story of Ruth, who introduces herself in the opening chapter with a biblical-sounding recitation of family history. The succession of events in her inherited past are revealed to be Ruth's memories as she grows from childhood to adulthood in Fingergone, a remote town on a lake in northern Idaho. Most of the novel's adventures belong to Ruth and her sister Lucille, orphaned by tragedy and raised by a series of female relatives that culminates in the accession of ne'er-do-well Aunt Sylvie. Robinson's descriptions of characters are both unexpected and credible, as of the derelict Sylvie, who is said to have smelled "dully clean, like chalk, or like a sun-warmed cat." For all her distracted demeanor, Sylvie is also credited with truly caring for her charges. "I wore her coat like beatitude," says Ruth, "and her arms around me were as heartening as mercy."

This tolerant tone makes us willing to believe the children might eventually be reared into regular society by their aunt, long after the odds of fact (Sylvie is, after all, a tramp and sleeps with her shoes under her pillow) warn otherwise. When her increasingly erratic behavior makes it inevitable that she be relieved of her post as guardian, Sylvie does not indict the townspeople who force this outcome, though their actions clearly violate a deeper law than the ones they invoke. Fingerbone's populace is characterized as bewildered and uninformed rather than malevolent by the author as well. Noah's ark, she reasons, being a house with compass and keel, must have confused his neighbors at the time who, watching it take shape, "would have put their hands in their pockets and clenched their lips and strolled home to houses they now found wanting in ways they could not understand."

One person does begin to understand the impulse behind Sylvie's transiency

and that is Ruth, who supposes an affinity of spirit between her aunt and her own dead mother, Helen. Truth comes to her through an auditory rather than visual revelation, in a remarkable experience with Sylvie, on the lake one night in a borrowed boat:

> We had ridden in against the bridge again, and were almost under it when the girders began to hum. She rested the flat of her hand against a piling. The sound grew louder and louder and there was a trembling through the whole frame. The whole long bridge was as quick and tense as vertebrae, singing with one alarm, and I could not have known from the sound which direction the train would be coming from. She had rested the oars, and we bobbed farther and farther under the bridge. She folded her arms on her knees and buried her face, and she swayed and swayed and swayed, so that the boat tipped a little.
>
> 'Helen,' I whispered, but she didn't reply.

The event seals Ruth's resolve to stay with Sylvie, a decision leading ineluctably to sharing her transient life. Intensified pressure from the town to separate the pair makes them decide to quit Fingerbone. This determination is confirmed in an apocalypse of fire, as Ruth and Sylvie burn their house and flee the village on foot, crossing the railroad bridge (a feat without precedent) on their way. The success of escape strengthens Ruth's vocation as outsider, one who acknowledges the lake in her history ("... below is always the accumulated past, which vanishes but does not vanish, which perishes and remains . . .") but resists the suicidal pull of its waters. The tension between succumbing and resistance remains, but is now controlled and useful. Like Sylvie, Ruth has constructed a self which can confront oblivion and survive.

Housekeeping is an achievement of similar magnitude, a deft defiance of convention, a singular book.

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A novel of intelligence (cont.)

(Continued from page 306)

fidelities are to Mara, to painting (which he abandons when the tastes of the country change from realism to pop art) and to the two friends he makes at fifteen on Nantucket. One of those friends is Jewish Sophie Ross who marries into extraordinary wealth and then loses a second, Israeli, husband in a Lebanese border skirmish. The other is Claire (called Pebble or Peb), daughter of "Babsie" and "Plinker" Sanford, an American aristocrat who slakes her guilt at being born into privilege by wholehearted social action; her "diversity of causes . ... expresses an almost frivolous abundance of dissenting passions."

The world of the title is not so much endless as Vicovian, cyclical, the rise and fall and rise again of love, of aesthetic movements, fidelities and successes, failures and dissatisfactions. Sophie, Claire, and Edmund live their lives separately at times, but always in touch. Claire marries Jeff, a teacher who is a tennis buff, they have a daughter who grows up with her mother's conscience and studies for the Episcopal ministry, and then Jeff dies, freeing Claire for Edmund. Sophie's two marriages are passages she lives through in order to free her for her enormously successful television life (in some respects resembling Barbara Walters's). But the bond among the three heroes, from their adolescence on Nantucket to their tour of the Soviet Union in June 1975 and into the present, is unbreakable.

It is a complex thirty-year friendship. Sophie has loved Edmund since she was fifteen: "She'd accepted the evident certainty of his love for Claire with a cool, complicated patience which had to do with her own adoration of Pebble." Claire and Sophie love each other as many women do; once in Russia Edmund walks in upon them:

> . . . they were lying in a large double bed, Claire reading half reclining on a pillow, Sophie bared to the waist, her head on Claire's lap, trying to have a brief afternoon sleep, splendor of two women's flesh joined in ancient affection, sensuality of sheets rumpled in great heat.

While the three travel together in the Soviet Union, Edmund reflects "on the dilemma facing three persons in middle age who've had a lifelong obsession for each other."

Since that lifelong obsession is the subject-matter of the book, one does not expect much "to happen," and of course it does not. There are changes in their lives, but their natures remain very much the same. At forty-five they are still looking for themselves, or "finding themselves" in the odious phrase of the six-

Religious booknotes

Ethical artistry & moral imagination

Marianne Sawicki

HOW TO DISTINGUISH good from evil, right from wrong? Moral reasoning never was a more timely topic for discussion than it is now, as the nation rethinks its responsibilities to care for the poor at home and the peace abroad.

The concept of *conscience* as the keystone of moral reasoning is rehabilitated by Walter Conn in an excellent treatise on foundational ethics. Conn identifies conscience as creative self-transcendence, that is, a certain facility which the individual acquires with progressively more sophisticated patterns of thinking about values. The cognitive calculus of value has been the domain, philosophically, of Bernard Lonergan, and empirically, of the developmental psychologists Kohlberg and Erikson. In Conn's synthetic discussion, Lonergan's logic is called upon to corroborate the scientific data of the developmentalists, particularly Kohlberg's most controversial finding: that the formal *structures* of moral reasoning eventually become the *content* of ultimate moral choice, as the moral subject chooses to be what he or she truly is.

***Conscience: Development and Self-Transcendence,** by Walter E. Conn, Religious Education Press, $11.95, 241 pp.*

Conscience, the quest for self-transcendence in the patterns of moral reason, compares favorably with, for example, "authenticity" as a criterion for the evaluation of moral choice, Conn says. Authenticity is not a criterion at all, "but rather an ideal which stands in need of a criterion." Conn proposes that structure *is* authenticity, in the same sense in which Freud could say that anatomy is destiny. The structures of reason, progressively acquired, exist as programs for an individual's creative response to situations. Human beings become "creators in the ethical art of living." To ethnicians and moral theologians falls the task of interpretive criticism of the works of this art.

Conn's lofty analysis never touches down to the clay of everyday moral dilemmas, nor does it make the jump from individual to social ethical problems; this is due perhaps to his choice of the ethereal Lonergan for his philosopher, and to his over-hasty dismissal of the mounting criticism of developmental theories which itself merits philosophical examination.

The problem of incarnating principles into choices is approached from an ecclesiastical angle in Kenneth Overberg's careful study of the moral magisterium of the American Catholic bishops. The ethical reasoning implicit in U.S. church statements about per-

***An Inconsistent Ethic? Teachings of the American Catholic Bishops,** by Kenneth R. Overberg, University Press of America, $9.75, 219 pp.*

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ties, learning that what they were is what they are and will be—Sophie's warm but self-contained ambition, Claire's selfless service to mankind, Edmund's reactionary devotion to his mother, his art, his two friends, himself. We know the trio well soon after the novel begins, we watch their forays into one experience after another, representing the major currents of twentieth-century American thought, to paraphrase V. L. Parrington, and then we settle back comfortably with them into middle-age, believing with them that "after the age of forty there isn't much to live for except friendship."

Despite the impressive and always accurate documentation of place (Edmund's visit to the Hermitage and the art he looks at there consumes five dense pages) and character, social movements, parental backgrounds, lovers, husbands, visits with each other, letters and postcards they exchange for all those years, do we ever feel *close* to these people? Curiously, not really. They are so detailed and so cerebral, their talk is so elevated and informed, we know so many *facts* about their milieus that, somehow, passion is smothered in them.

Francine Gray would be the first to admit that the novel is about the changelessness of personality, I am sure, and yet this keeps us from experiencing

sonal morality is based largely on an appeal to the church's authority, Overberg says, while their teaching on social morality, being more recent, relies on three other sources as well: Scripture, human experience, and personal responsibility. There is a certain logical incoherence about this discrepancy of sources; hence the title *An Inconsistent Ethic*. If the *personal* moral magisterium is being ignored because it neglects important sources of ethical reasoning, Overberg asks, what then accounts for the fact that the progressive and constructive teachings of the *social* magisterium also have failed to make an impact? Overberg suggests it is because American Catholics have little direct experience of social evils. "The realities of starvation and unemployment and racism and miserable housing do not touch most lives." Therefore, the social conscience sleeps. Overberg's advice for rousing it: more dialogue, discussion, education, and action. Engagement with life is the spark of ethical creativity.

David Beckmann, one feels, is engaged with life. In his thoughtful essay, an ethical artist with dirty hands shares

Where Faith and Economics Meet: A Christian Critique, by David M. Beckmann, Augsburg Publishing House, $5.95, 154 pp.

the creative reasoning behind his own moral choices. Beckmann's perspective is unusual; he is both a Christian pastor and an economist for the World Bank. He regards production and consumption as eucharistic realities, for all the fruits of the earth and of human labor are things that God can make holy. Otherwise, Beckmann's theology is somewhat odd. He reads the Old Testament as "an inquiry into the wealth of nations." God's creative thumbprint reveals itself in "modern materialistic economic culture," a culture defined by six values: this-worldliness, progress, reason, liberty, equality, and fraternity. Each of these values is served, to a greater or less extent, by the two opposite systems of economic organization in the world: markets or bureaucracy (i.e., capitalism or socialism). Beckmann sets his moral imagination to work within this perhaps too-simple matrix of analysis. He tells stories about his experiences with World Bank projects all over the globe, in places where the six values of economic culture are realized in widely various ways. The book is sprinkled with pithy conclusions; for example, that reducing our consumption does not directly help the poor; or that the impact of charitable contributions to poor nations is negligible when compared with the effect of foreign investment and trade upon them. What, then, can the individual do to advance economic justice? Amidst his suggestions, Beckmann wryly points out the irony in the proliferation of organizations that aim to show people how to live more simply. The moral response of a model Christian's holy materialism, Beckmann says, should exhibit the surprise of God's Spirit, "the individuality, the adventure, the bold freedom."

John Deedy's "interim biography" of Daniel Berrigan, meant to infect readers with the motivation that prompts Berrigan's exploits, portrays a man whom many consider a virtuoso among creative ethical artists. But can one *explain* such a prophet? Deedy's highly readable pastiche of interviews, press accounts, and Berrigan writings makes an engrossing story indeed. Yet

"Apologies, Good Friends . . ." An Interim Biography of Daniel Berrigan, S.J. by John Deedy, Fides/Claretian, $6.95, 151 pp.

it doesn't deliver the ethical impact, that spark of insight, that one experiences in apprehending Berrigan's poetic-prophetic gestures directly. Ink and paper can't give you the smell of the napalmed files at Catonsville, or the sound of the hammer blows at King of Prussia, Pa. So Deedy did for Berrigan what the synoptics did for Jesus: tidied up the world-shattering parables into exemplary stories with lessons at the end. In this case, however, the inspiration-starved nation and church still have access to the historical Berrigan, parable that he is, through his own writings. Deedy's book will not likely inspire anyone whom Berrigan has not already touched; but those with consciences piqued by the priest-poet will find Deedy's glimpses of Berrigan's life a fascination.

The nation is awash with dubious creativities: "creative accounting," "creative management," and "creative" cuts (euphemism: "savings") in the federal programs for the poor. But we are chronically short on ethical artistry and moral imagination. All four books are welcome.

MARIANNE SAWICKI

(Marianne Sawicki is a theologian, editor, and writer. This is the first of what will be a regular column.)

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any surprises. Despite the spread of time in which they live and the amount of history in our time which surrounds them, they remain predictable, even stereotypic in their undeviating natures. We are not even surprised when Claire enters, briefly, a convent. She explains to the visiting Edmund: "The reality of my need for the sacred suddenly became greater than my need for any proof of its existence. And so I needed to bear witness to it. . . ." Having borne witness to every kind of human need and cause, Claire's newest choice is another piece of evidence of her undeviating character. We know that it, like the others before, will pass into the generalized concern that defines her until the last page.

World Without End is an engrossing but static book, violating the horizontal progress of most fiction by the dense, vertical views of the three friends. Gray has used them as catafalques on which to hang what has gone on in the United States in the middle decades of this century and, as a result, it seems to me, has lost the kind of intensity one looks for in the novel. It is a notable social history, to my mind, more than a compelling story. It is about three persons who are created at great length and depth—but do not live.

From particularity to a discourse for all

THE ANALOGICAL IMAGINATION
CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND THE CULTURE OF PLURALISM

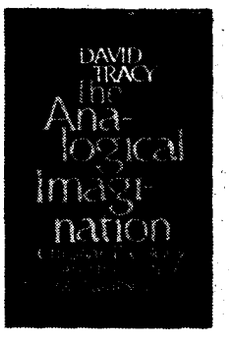
David Tracy

Crossroad, $14.95, 496 pp.

David Burrell

THIS LONG-promised book by David Tracy represents the second moment in elaborating a theology according to the pattern which he espouses: "fundamental" (his earlier *Blessed Rage for Order*), "systematic," and "pastoral." Each step demands a specific mode of argument and reflection, and we are only doing theology when we attend in some fashion to all three. As step two, we might expect to find a systematic theology elaborated here; in fact we are offered a stunning prolegomenon to any present or future systematics. I make this observation without criticism to locate the genre of this work, for as a prolegomenon it is eminently successful in releasing erstwhile students and teachers of theology from hobbling either/or's. And it is stunning in its scope as well as in its capacity for ordering current complexities. That the prose of the work itself contributes its own measure of complexity is a stubborn fact which I shall try first to neutralize and finally to explain.

The overriding concern of the work is in fact pastoral. Tracy anguishes over the plight of anyone living today who hopes to make sense out of their situation in the world. For the patterns we need to use to find our way have proliferated, and we are told we can only choose among them. Yet if we cannot find grounds adequate to the choice, then the entire endeavor to make sense of our lives and our destiny becomes willful—or "privatized." Formulated by Sartre, this dilemma faces teachers as they find their students all sharing some form of relativism. For that is the public philosophy of our age, and the collective ways of meeting it may be more frightening still: diverse forms of fundamentalism. (If this were a mere conflict of -isms, we could afford to yawn; to partake in its drama among students is crucifying.) What ever happened to critical intelligence and the promise and the promise of the Enlightenment?



Tracy's response is brilliant, and in developing it he elaborates the mode of thinking appropriate to systematic theology. Once we grasp the import of this response, together with his employ of three distinctions, we will be able to appreciate the simplicity of his argument. Only a simplicity born of wit can contribute to our capacity to discern among bewildering alternatives—as only a mindless optimist can celebrate these as "pluralism." Tracy, ever irenic and always mindful, is no optimist. Hence his avowal of the need for *traditio* and of the human necessity for that quality of discernment and penetration emanating from particular communities as they continue to appropriate critically their originating memories. What can result from such a crucible we call *classics* when they "so disclose a compelling truth about our lives that we cannot deny them some kind of normative status."

Classics then become a bridge from the inescapably particular character of a community of faith to a mode of discourse which compels the attention of all—over time as well as space. The *fact* of such works as part of our shared history offers an alternative model for rationality to the Enlightenment ideal of autonomous reason. Since a classic "lives as a classic" only if it continues to find "readers willing to be provoked by its claim to attention"(109), the resulting conversation—with the text itself and among those responding to it—becomes a living tradition of interpretation. One can readily see how this model can be employed with respect to the recognized classics of Jewish and Christian tradition, and indeed to elucidate the founding event of Christianity: Jesus himself. The very dynamics inherent in the production and the continued reception of a classic allow Tracy to aver: "for the Christian the present experience of the spirit of the Risen Lord who is the crucified Jesus of Nazareth *is* the Christian religious classic event"(265).

By focusing on the living community as bearer of a tradition and insisting that "tradition is the major constitutive *mediating* reality of the event of Jesus Christ," Tracy makes us attend to the continuing call for interpreting our lives in the light of the ideals of a community, and re-interpreting those ideals by our informed experience. There is a no other, no easy way. Moreover, no major classic is ever adequate to the reality to which it nonetheless manages to give voice, and all the more so religous classics. In fact,

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"the intrinsic unsteadiness of the major classic becomes the sheer dialectical tension of the religious classic"(214). The result is an inherent multiplicity of expressions, evident already in the various faces of Jesus and of discipleship offered in the apostolic writings. Tracy offers a way to account for this variety of interpretations, and especially for the manifold theological accounts we need by outlining an ideal of theological understanding which demands that it be *relatively* adequate to the realities encountered. He then goes on to spell out "relative adequacy" in three pairs of features which jointly show how one characteristic form of presentation will inevitably need to be complemented by another.

So long as we can employ a metatheological test of complementarity, we can recognize how certain positions represent needed correctives of others. And the exercise is not arcane; every vigorous conversation must employ it. An irenic spirit, it is true, will want to extend complementarity to cover what others would call opposing position, yet the perspective of hindsight often supports the wider judgment. In any case, even suspended conversations shape the subsequent thought of the interlocutors, and vigorous opposition concentrates the mind. What Tracy does oppose is retreat from all conversation or a silence imposed.

The first distinction he employs divides theological modes into *manifesting* and *proclaiming*, with Eliade exemplifying the first and Barth et al. the second. Tracy sketches how each mode in fact calls upon the other when it comes to a more complete presentation. (These two are later supplemented by the mode proper to transforming *action*, to accommodate more recent liberation theologies, and the demands of complementarity proportionately expanded.) The second regards criteria. Theology demands two sets of criteria operating at once: the first testing how appropriate an expression may be to the tradition it embodies, and the second testing it for wider comprehensibility. The third distinction regards ways of rendering intelligible what inherently surpasses our capacity for expression. Here Tracy shows how customary oppositions between analogical and dialectical language can be rendered complementary by an account of analogical discourse whch includes a negative moment, and by recognizing that even the most "dialectical" of theologians must finally affirm the primacy of grace.

Grace is the key to what systematics he does offer, and the passages celebrating it betray a passion nearly capable of enlivening the prose which ever hangs heavily over so otherwise lightsome a work. It indicates Tracy's primary public, academe, and even identifies his major conversation partners: what John Robinson calls the "German-American school." Were he to take some effective steps to distance himself, however, from that single public and that restricted set of interlocutors, one suspects that Tracy might one day himself offer us a classic.

There's no shtick like gnostic

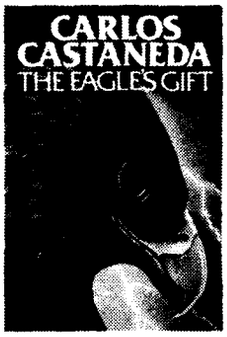
THE EAGLE'S GIFT

Carlos Castaneda

Simon & Schuster, $12.95, 316 pp.

Richard de Mille

CARLOS CASTANEDA was born in Peru in 1925; he came to this country in 1951. Living and working in Los Angeles, he found time to study journalism, creative writing, and social sciences. In 1973, he received a Ph.D. at the University of California, Los Angeles, for apprenticing himself to a mystical old Mexican Indian named don Juan Matus and for documenting ten years of apprenticeship in three volumes of field reports, the third of which was accepted as a dissertation in anthropology. On page *iv* of that official document, Castaneda claimed to have been born in Brazil in 1935.



The first volume of the field reports was published by the University of California Press in 1968 under the title *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, which was rather misleading, since don Juan's teachings conflict with what is known of Yaqui culture. The second and third volumes were published by Simon and Schuster as *A Separate Reality* (1971) and *Journey to Ixtlan* (1972), which were praised in *Commonweal* (1971:482; 1973: 117) by Joseph Grange, who found in them serious exploration of psychedelic and mystical worlds not recognized by Western consciousness, preliterate epistemology as exacting as that of contemporary science, and magnanimous stoic ethics.

In 1976, my *Castaneda's Journey* proved to most readers what many had long suspected: that the four don Juan books (including by then *Tales of Power*) were entirely fiction and that don Juan was an imaginary person, a phantom informant, a transcultural construction embodying social theories certain professors at UCLA wished to validate while satisfying vulgar longings for ancient gurus, metaphysical puzzles, and transcendental wisdom. Undaunted by the exposé, Castaneda laid under our 1977 Christmas trees *The Second Ring of Power*, which strained all but the most flexible credulity and was the first don Juan book to draw more brickbats than bouquets from popular reviewers. In that fifth book, stoical humanism gave way to otherworldly occultism; an appealing companionship of teacher and pupil was replaced by sexless paranormal war between the sexes; humor wilted, storytelling waned, and fans defected

Writing for my *Don Juan Papers* (1980), Douglass McFerran saw in *Second Ring* a moldy milestone marking Castaneda's diabolic progress toward a full-blown Gnostic theology, in which the Plumed Serpent Quetzalcoatl would confound good and evil and give man rules for achieving immortality. *The Eagle's Gift*, whose last chapter is titled "The Plumed Serpent," handsomely confirms McFerran's prescience. Once more the legendary Carlos sojourns among mesoamerican fellow seekers,

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this time discovering unplumbed depths of his own prior experience in Mexico, unsuspected compartments on the "left side" of his mind, where lurk eschatological lessons long before taught by don Juan, but then quite forgotten on don Juan's command. According to one of those lessons, now remembered:

> The power that governs the destiny of all living things is called the Eagle, not because it is an eagle or has anything to do with an eagle, but because it appears to the seer as an immeasurable jet-black eagle, standing erect as an eagle stands, its height reaching to infinity.

All living things belong to the Eagle, their creator and reason for living. When they die, their awareness floats to the Eagle's beak, there to be eaten; for awareness is the Eagle's food. Since this aquiline Moloch governs all creatures equally, men cannot pray to It for grace or favor; for "the human part of the Eagle is too insignificant to move the whole." Nonetheless—not because It loves Its creatures but because It values awareness—the Eagle has granted one gift to living things: the power to disobey the summons at death and thereby to preserve awareness beyond death.

The first seers were made by the Eagle, Which put them into the world to recruit, train, and lead other seers "to freedom"—that is, out of this inferior realm, up to a higher and better place. In a nutshell, gnosticism: This world is to work one's way out of.

Every cycle of seers leaves a redemptor behind to begin a new cycle, each cycle guided by the Rule of the Eagle. It is up to the seers to follow the Rule, which is not a story but a map. "The Eagle does not care about man's actions and yet It has provided man with a passageway to freedom."

This sixth book is an intricate, mysterious, bizarre, but tedious labyrinth wherein Castaneda cultists will gleefully lose their minds and the general reader will quickly lose the thread. There is nothing here to gratify an interest in Indians, Mexico, anthropology, healing, or drama. Much of the narration is mere synopsis, devoid of action or feeling. In vain one looks for sex, love,human relations, or normal emotions; instead one endures an allegorical ordeal, where metaphor piles on metaphor, contrivance on contrivance, emblem on icon without relief.

Veteran Juanists will no doubt cherish Castaneda's solemn instructions for would-be lucid dreamers, his recapitulation of *Ixtlan*'s ethics disguised as an exegesis of *stalking*, his sly allusions to currently fashionable wonders: Atlantis, pyramid power, parallel universes, right-brain function, shared dreams, sensory deprivation, altered states, elephant man, astrological character types, Ouspensky's wheel of fortune, Gurdjieff's planets, cosmic anatomy, and the god who has forgotten his divinity. Indeed, Castaneda is a fountain of allusions. Himself an obvious apostate, he calls his witches "little sisters," finds in don Juan a perfect being, sees in the Eagle a faint reflection of man. His seers possess free will to disobey the Eagle's summons; they struggle with a problem not of evil but of error; they enter a condition known as "glory." Just before being eaten by the Eagle, awareness passes through a momentary purgatory. Don Juan calls his disciples together to announce his imminent departure from this world, but Carlos forgets the announcement in that "other momentous event of jumping to certain death and not dying." Presently Carlos is resurrected as an amnesiac.

From the moment a warrior understands the nature of awareness, don Juan tells Carlos, he ceases to be a person, and the human condition is no longer a part of his view. "What I am describing," writes Castaneda, "is alien to us; therefore, it seems unreal." Quite so. The don Juan books have lately turned into a morbid magic theater, where entrance is not for everybody.

An ever more important book

TOO LONG A SACRIFICE

Jack Holland

Dodd, Mead, $10.95, 217 pp.

David J. Bowman

In my judgment, this is one of the best popular books for Americans since Gary McEoin's *Northern Ireland: Prisoner of History* in 1974. It is frankly nationalist, stating that British withdrawal is essential to a political solution, but it also goes far to destroy the Irish-American myth of the Provisional IRA "political patriot." Jack Holland shows again and again how brutal the Provies have been, and how they have disregarded the nationalist people more and more. "Gangster" is his word for them since 1975.

All of us who write or speak on Northern Ireland run the risk of misleading others by referring to "nationalists" and "loyalists" (or whatever other political terms are used) by religious affiliation, "Catholic" and "Protestant"—too often giving the impression that bad religion is still basic to the conflict. The author begins thus. He is more careful later, but I fear the unwary reader will have a skewed mind-set.

Be that as it may, Jack Holland succeeds admirably in describing the conflicting emotions that have pervaded Northern Ireland during the recent past, as civic events flow on and violence besets the communities. For Nationalists: anger, despair, frustration at the twin evils of political disfranchisement and juridical mistreatment. For Loyalists: fear of being "betrayed" by Britain and of losing their cultural heritage as well as political power.

I began this review in Washington in March, then asked the book-review editor to let me finish it after visiting Ireland-Northern Ireland April 1-9, so am continuing it on April 11 in D. C. My idea was to check out my opinions of Mr. Holland's book with some close friends, north and south, of various ideologies, whose experience and judgment I trust. In general, they confirm his factual account and most of his evaluations.

The immediate context of this review is the Fermanagh election April 9, in which Harry West of the official Unionist

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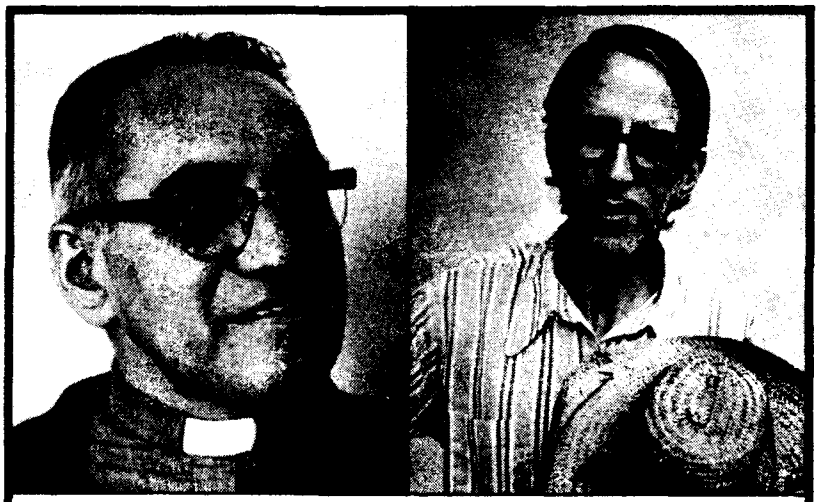
Party was opposed only by Bobby Sands, a Provisonal IRA prisoner in the Maze who had been on hunger-strike since March 1. Other Nationalist-oriented candidates dropped out in favor of an independent, Noel Maguire, brother of the deceased M.P. Then, within an hour of the deadline for candidates, Maguire dropped out—for reasons not made public, but intimidation seems likely. This left the running open to Sands, for whom a strong campaign was waged, playing the "green card" of anti-British, anti-Protestant, anti-establishment emotion and conviction—as West was playing the "orange card" again, in a disheartening reprise of the past. A phone call from Dublin this morning brought news of Sands's victory by about 1500 votes—so the political whirligig will spin again. Was it a vote for terrorism, or simply for keeping a Unionist out of Westminster? Even time may not tell.

I think this election makes Jack Holland's book even more important, in that he gives a sense of the resentment in the minority community that goes far to explain such phenomena as this election. He describes the "moral limbo" of civic life, the discrimination against the minority, the intransigence of the majority, the role of Mr. Paisley in fomenting trouble and helping the IRA grow. He describes Belfast 1969-71 as the "type" of the problem, and Direct Rule as a belated and undesirable attempt by the British to take responsibility. He details the "five techniques" used by the army in 1971 on men arrested under the Special Powers Act, whose "inhuman treatment" led to a lasting distrust of uniformed or plainclothes forces.

His chapter on sectarian murders is poignant. The one on "Identity Crisis" is accurate and basic; is the majority "British" or "Ulster-ites" or "Northern Irish"? His account of the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) and Provisional IRA, their ups and downs in violence and non-violence, has an authenticity probably provided by David McKittrick, Belfast writer for the *Irish Times*, mentioned in the preface. The police-army-judiciary relationships, and their centrality to both the security of the powerful and much of the resentment of the powerless, is de-



What it means to be a Christian today in the Third World

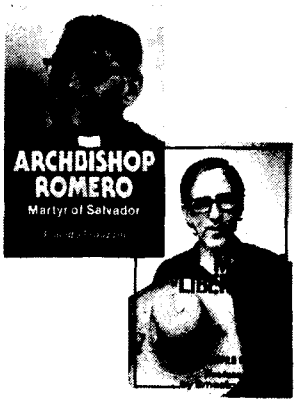
ARCHBISHOP ROMERO
Martyr of Salvador
by Placido Erdozain. With a preface by Jorge Lara-Braud

Father Placido, who worked many years with Archbishop Romero, relates the inspiring story of a timid man who became a fearless prophet for social justice. His intimate and personal recollection of a gentle pastor who refused to abandon his people and who gave preferential treatment to the poor is published one year after Archbishop Romero's martyrdom. He was shot in the heart as he was celebrating the Eucharist in a hospital chapel.
$4.95 paperback

MYSTIC OF LIBERATION
A Portrait of Bishop Pedro Casaldaliga of Brazil
by Teofilo Cabestrero. With a prefatory poem by Ernesto Cardenal

"There is no one quite like Dom Pedro, a witty, fiery, mystical, practical poet-priest, bishop of the poor, defender of the Indian, a combination of Oscar Romero, Helder Camara, Dan Berrigan. . . .yet he is also a 'typical' priest of the church that has given the world so many saints and martyrs in just the past decade."
—Thomas E. Quigley, USCC Advisor for Latin America

"Bishop Casaldaliga's no-holds-barred answers to his trusted questioner personify the stunning witness of the new church of Brazil in which he, as pastor and prophet, and poet, leads a daily Christ-like defense of the Amazonian poor against the powers of death. . . .We, U. S. Christians, need to read this book. . . ."
—Jorge Lara-Braud, Inter-American Ecumenist and Director of the Council on Theology and Culture of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S.
Illustrated $7.95 paperback



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tailed and accurate.

The writing is clear, but the "beauty" mentioned in the blurb is confined almost entirely to the last paragraphs of each chapter—evidence that they were originally separate articles. The author's suggestion at the end shows no originality: British withdrawal, an all-Ireland conference, a 32-county state with a Bill of Rights. This may be the direction in which things will go, but hardly in the way he predicts: no civil war, because the Loyalists would not fight for "Ulster-nationalism" and the Provos would not fight with the British gone. As one of my Northern Irish friends said, this is the most optimistic scenario possible, and in my opinion is unreal.

The majority has plenty to fight *against*, and to fight *with*—one hundred twenty thousand registered rifles, for one thing, plus guns retained by ex-B Specials. I do not know anyone living in Northern Ireland who thinks civil war is unlikely; there are such people, but I do not know them. A recent conference on "Federalism" co-sponsored by Glencree and Corrymeela offered some encouragement to those of us who believe in reconciliation, first in the north and then in the whole island. But the process in any scenario will be long and difficult; no merely logical "solution" is possible, with bigotry setting the scene and the dead ruling the living.

I am sure the book is inaccurate in a couple of important matters. The Protestant clergy took the initiative toward the December 1974 Feakle meeting with PIRA, not vice versa. They talked of the northern Loyalists' view of PIRA. They knew both "sides" would try to use them, but felt the time was ripe for opening up channels of communication between the British government and the Provos. They were willing to be used for peace, and they helped bring about a cease-fire at Christmas, lasting for six months. They should get credit for this.

The Ulster workers' strike in May 1974 not only brought down the Faulkner partnership government, but immensely increased the minority's distrust of the police and army. They saw hundreds of illegal actions—seizing of petrol stations, blocking of roads, intimidation of workers at the entrances to estates—go unpunished. These were the same "law and order" forces which had been arresting and jailing people merely on suspicion! The Amnesty International and Bennett reports have only deepened this distrust, although the present Chief Constable, Jack Hermon, is more and more seen to be fair.

Jack Holland sees much Communist influence in the conflict; I would call it "Marxist" or "leftist." The Belfast Provos seem recently to lean further leftward. The Dublin group has been consistently merely socialist. Both have often called the official IRA "Communist" as a tactic in their internecine strife over territory in Belfast. Yet the Republican Clubs in the north have some capable political operatives, like Seamus Lynch on the Belfast City Council. "Communist" they are not.

Our views on the UDA differ, too—although I admit that my friendship with Glenn Barr may color my judgment. The author thinks the UFF has always been a pseudo-organization, a cover for UDA killers. He says the UDA's "real business is assassination" again. I prefer to think that Andy Tyrie is a force for moderation, and that the New Ulster Political Research Group is genuinely converted to politics. Reports from the recent conference on "Federalism" have it that Glenn's "Independent Ulster" stood up well as an alternative to other proposals.

Jack Holland says he has written a book to arouse thought, rather than slogans. I hope it does, and that it will reach even the thinkers in Northern Ireland. He says: "the greatest and most disastrous compromise was the creation of Northern Ireland itself . . ." so he will surely arouse more than thought in the majority there.

My main quarrel with the book is its excessive focus on violence as the historical reality—violence from both "sides" and from security forces. He is in good company in depicting it so, but surely the most evident historical fact is that by far most of the people in the north try to live decent, industrious, loving lives—like Jack's mother, for instance. Maybe his next series of reports will provide this balance. But for now, it is likely that the violence will continue. Pray for the people in the north.

Conversion & maturation

TURNING
REFLECTIONS ON THE EXPERIENCE OF CONVERSION

Emilie Griffin

Doubleday, $8.95, 189 pp.

CREATIVE DISLOCATION—THE MOVEMENT OF GRACE

Robert McAfee Brown

Abingdon, $7.95, 144 pp.

John Carmody

THESE TWO fine books make an interesting comparison. Emilie Griffin is an advertising executive interested in the dynamics of conversion because of her own passage from Christian Science through Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism. Robert McAfee Brown is a prominent Protestant theologian interested in the dynamics of grace because of his own passage from cradle Presbyterianism through Christian ecumenism to liberation theology. Although they draw on different resources, they share a faith that God uses time for our maturation, even when we resist him. Let me detail something of how each book develops this thesis and then risk reflecting on it briefly for another winter of our discontent.

Turning develops the maturation thesis tactfully, blending personal reminiscence and analysis with materials from other converts such as C.S. Lewis, Bede Griffiths, Thomas Merton, Avery Dulles, and Dorothy Day. Partly because of its close use of these other authors, it evokes moods of the 1930s and forties, when Christian faith probably seemed a more exact entity than it does today. A Merton or Dulles, wrestling with Roman Catholicism, had a definite doctrine and discipline to confront. A Lewis or Day found that choosing Christianity meant

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separating from friends or lovers who bitterly opposed it. Griffin advances the mood into the sixties and seventies, when most hard disjunctions softened, but she retains a motif of either/or. Her own journey took her to specific crossroads and she renders them effectively. A first virtue of *Turning*, then, is that it reminds the reader how concrete conversions are. At specific times and places the Christian God creates a *carrefour*; the fork we take can make all the difference.

That is not to say that conversion is a one-shot affair, nor that Griffin provides no analogues from religious lives less dramatic than those of converts. The divine call that brings some persons to dramatic shifts may be found trying to lure many others to greater depths or new horizons. Still, by imposing the heightened narratives of converts on the general religious grid, *Turning* makes prevenient grace or the common lure of God more than bloodless abstractions. The categorical stories of converts keep the transcendental operations of divine love from seeming Teutonic fog. Like the grace of Jesus or the saints, Griffin's stories remind us that God is particular, personal, no comfortable generality.

When she schematizes conversion, so that a modest bit of generality might illumine the particulars, Griffin speaks of a progression: desire, dialectic, struggle, surrender, and afterwards. I found the descriptions of desire most affecting. As Dorothy Day's title *The Long Loneliness* suggests, the story of conversion is well seen as a romance. Granted the place of dialectical reasoning, the place of the struggle that pins the recalcitrant will to the mat, and the place of surrender or conversion proper, the beginnings, undertow, and hints of wisdom tend to play in the key of love. One thinks of Pascal: you would not seek had you not already found. One recalls Augustine: late have I loved thee. For the convert surprised by joy, following the golden string of love, divinity becomes not too strange to be believed but too good. In the aftermath of surrender to this goodness, struggle and dialectic and desire continue, but with a better sense of proportion. For all her gratitude or weakness, the convert's self matters less and less,

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the convert's God matters more and more.

Robert McAfee Brown's warming faith that God uses time for our maturation expresses itself both less dramatically than Griffin's and more. Insofar as Brown is not a convert to Christianity, in the normal sense of the term, he reports no technicolor turning that sent him to new commitments. However, insofar as he has been deeply engaged in the social and political movements of the past twenty-five years, his journey has been scenic indeed: the deep South of the Civil Rights struggle, the Rome of Vatican II, Vietnam and the Pentagon, South Africa and Cuba. The motif has been from liberalism to radicalization. In the face of systemic evil the only hopes that now endure have been well grounded, well annealed.

Again these lessons are offered with blessed specificity. The marvelous marriage to Sydney shows the reader how more causes, a bigger world, and even painful consciousness-raising can mean faith better broken and shared. The disillusions with Stanford and Union Theological Seminary, fine institutions first and God's good servants second, are almost too magnanimous. Church and State, pulpit and lectern — Brown has scanned faith in them all. Sixty now, he looks back with both gratitude and sobriety. There has been so much grace, there are promises of so much more grace, that he has to write a *eucharistia*. There has been so much dislocation, so many exhibitions of evil, that he has to announce a *dies irae*. Small is beautiful, but inhumane bigness will not go away soon. God has blessed America, but with the rest of the North, America faces a terrible reckoning before the Son of Man/King depicted in Matthew 25. The Holocaust bids all mortal flesh keep silent, yet which of us could contain our hearts' burning when he talked with us on the road and explained the scriptures?

Both books merit more than a perfunctory good review because they are benefactions. To be sure, some readers will ask Brown to chasten liberation theology with a reading of Marxism like that of Solzhenitsyn. Other readers will feel Griffin stays at too safe a distance from our social cancers and politics, or that she has been packaged too cleverly by Doubleday. In the final analysis, these are but cavils. Both books are honest confessions of faith. Both are edifying — an old word I wish I could use more often. In the winter of those discontented by Ronald Reagan and John Paul II, by rampant selfishness and straitened faith, genuine edification is especially precious. *Turning* and *Creative Dislocation* built up this reader's hopes that the twofold command, the one same love, really can be enough.

Christians, messianism, & Marxism

MARXISM

AN AMERICAN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Arthur F. McGovern

Orbis Books, $12.95, 339 pp.

MARX AGAINST THE MARXISTS

Jose Miranda

Orbis Books, $12.95, 316 pp.

Gregory Baum

ARTHUR McGOVERN's *Marxism: An American Christian Perspective* is an eminently useful book on an important topic. While Marxist thought exerts great cultural influence in many Western societies, it remains largely unknown in North America, even among educated people. Public education does not introduce people to the Marxist tradition. Most Americans think of it as alien. Until fairly recently, Catholic teaching has encouraged this ignorance. Ecclesiastical documents spoke of Marxism as an unchanging, self-identical system characterized by atheistic materialism, class war and the denial of private property. Since 1971, however, beginning with Paul VI's *Octogesima Adveniens*, church documents have treated Marxism in a more careful and nuanced manner.

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Paul VI argued that if Marxism is understood as a total philosophy or a Leninist political project, it must be rejected by Christians. At the same time, he acknowledged the usefulness of Marxism as a form of social analysis. Several national hierarchies have written pastorals on Marxism. The French bishops followed Paul VI, yet they added their own appreciation of 'cultural Marxism' by which they meant the impact of Marxism on the cultural self-understanding of society. They acknowledged as a positive development the influence of cultural Marxism on Catholic theology. Recently the American hierarchy published a pastoral letter on Marxist thought which was philosophically original and profound. Yet in contrast with the French, the American bishops looked upon Marxism as a system of ideas far removed from their country's cultural tradition.

Some Catholic colleges offer courses on Christianity and Marxism. But they never had a suitable textbook. There was no book that analyzed the evolution of Marx's thought and the development of Marxism after Marx, and then presented the gradual conversion of the Christian churches to greater social concern, recorded their new openness to socialism, and told the story of their dialogue with Marxism. Now such a book exists. McGovern's *Marxism* is the ideal college text. Scholars may object that it covers too much ground, that it does not deal exhaustively with many of the important topics touched upon, and that the author takes sides without always presenting all of his arguments. These are objections that can be raised against any textbook. McGovern has written a brilliant text, the right kind of book for North Americans, in particular for North American Catholics.

The book is divided into three sections. The first one deals with Marxism. Here the author treats the young Marx and his Hegelian background, the later Marx, and the important controversy on how these two, the young and the old, are related. He then turns to Engels and the Marxism of the European social-democratic parties until World War I, including Bernstein's revisionism. Then he summarizes Leninism, the impact of

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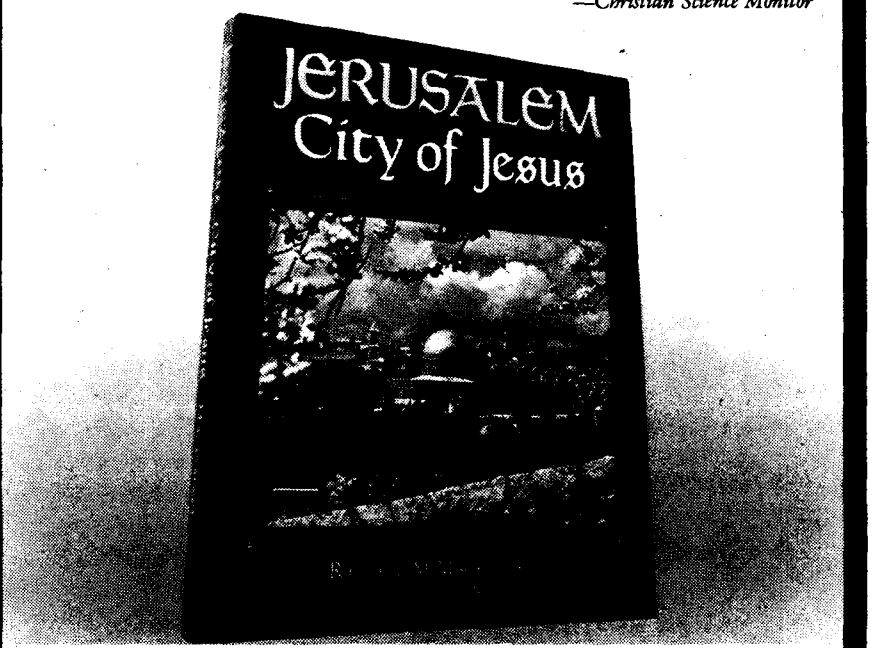

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the Russian revolution, and the transformation of Marxism as the official ideology of the Third International. Finally McGovern explores various forms of critical Marxism, especially the Western thinkers, such as Lukacs, the Frankfurt School, Gramsci, Althusser and Garaudy. Here he offers useful summaries, even though the reader familiar with any of these authors may occasionally be disappointed. One has reason to be unhappy about McGovern's summary of Hegel's thought. He offers a positivistic reading of Hegel which leads him to the curious conclusion that Hegel regarded Christianity as anachronistic and obsolete.

The second section deals with the development of Catholic social thought. It traces the history from the church's official anathema to the willingness to dialogue with Marxists. This section deals with the impact of Marxist thought on recent Catholic social teaching, especially the Marxist critique of contemporary capitalism. It presents an excellent chapter on Latin American Liberation Theology and another equally interesting one on the conflict between "Christians for Socialism" and the Chilean bishops during the Allende years. The author shows that Marxist thought and practice have many trends, and that Christians in dialogue with Marxism must distinguish between these trends and clearly define their partners in dialogue and cooperation.

The final section of the book offers critical reflections on Marxism and examines the standard arguments raised against it by the older ecclesiastical documents. Here the author reveals his own point of view. He distinguishes between dogmatic and critical Marxism, and argues that critical Marxism, open to ongoing historical experience and intellectual revisionism, is useful for Christians dedicated to social justice, even in the United States. He shows moreover that this position fits in to the parameters outlined in ecclesiastical teaching since Paul VI. Even Marx's historical materialism, the author argues, was originally a dialectical theory of consciousness, which affirmed the primacy of people's material struggle for survival in the creation of their world of ideas. Such a dialectical theory of consciousness does not exclude the creativity of the human spirit nor does it imply an ontological materialism that effectively negates human spirit and divine substance. The author shows that there are Christian theologians who have made use of this historical materialism in their understanding of salvation history.

While the author mentions the primacy of action in pursuit of truth (in connection with Latin American theology), he does not bring it into focus in his final reflections. A first reading of his book may tempt the reader to think that McGovern is an idealist, that he understands his theological task simply as distinguishing between various forms of Marxism and deciding which of these forms can be brought in harmony with certain trends of Christian thought. To what extent does the primacy of action find expression in his book? A careful reading clearly reveals that the author is involved in a socio-political project, that for him the absence of Marxism from American culture is a lacuna with harmful consequences, and that he wants to introduce Marxism into the mainstream of American religious thought. For this reason McGovern follows Michael Harrington in emphasizing the democratic character of Marxism. Marx himself was a democrat; he spoke of revolution only at certain moments; he envisaged a peaceful entry into socialism in developed countries such as England and the United States. The action base of McGovern's work lies in the neighborhood of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee.

Since I am writing this review in Canada, may I add that it is questionable whether the Christian left in this country should try, with McGovern, to rehabili-

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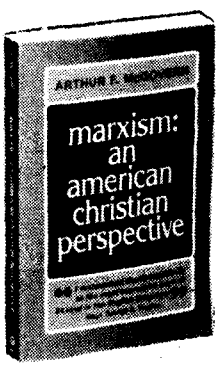
tate a special form of Marxism, or whether it should rather explore the Canadian socialist tradition which, following the British, is more eclectic, more pragmatic, capable of adopting Marxist paradigms, and yet ready to acknowledge its indebtedness to Christian impulses from the beginning.

Reading McGovern from this point of view, the question arises whether the Marxism acceptable to him as a Christian theologian, i.e., the action-based and action-oriented theory of consciousness and form of social analysis, does not amputate so many elements from Marxism that the patient has become unrecognizable. In particular, does McGovern deal sufficiently with the messianic elements in Marxist doctrine? Did not the power of Marxism derive in large measure from the reference to the absolute, such as the destiny of mankind, the inevitability of socialism, the end of all domination after the socialist revolution, and the final withering away of the state? To cancel these elements altogether and to make Marxism simply an eminently useful social theory would be to destroy it. At the same time to leave these messianic elements intact makes Marxism a false philosophy of history and in fact a dangerous ideological instrument. Perhaps Christians are the only ones who are able to negate the messianic elements in Marxism dialectically, that is to say repudiate Marx's this-worldly eschatology not in the name of positivism and pure securlarity but rather by correcting them in the light of God's promises revealed in Israel and in Jesus Christ. For Christians do believe in a human destiny, they do believe that history is to be redeemed, they acknowledge God's empowering grace operative among all people, and while they do not expect the arrival of God's kingdom in history (the fulfillment of the divine promises transcends history) they do acknowledge that participation in the struggle for justice embodies the absolute, for here fidelity to the invisible God becomes incarnate.

Jose Miranda's *Marx Against the Marxists* is a study written from a Latin American point of view. The author finds himself on a continent where Marxism is the widely accepted social philosophy that reigns in many university departments, principally in the structuralist, Althusserian version. Here Marxists insist that Marxism is a science. The humanist elements of Marxism, strongly emphasized by the young Marx, have been set aside. Althusser argued that Marx later changed his mind. The structuralists claim that Marxism is in no sense a humanism. On the contrary, since history moves in accordance with certain laws, humanism is an illusion. Althusserian Marxism regards itself as an anti-humanism. The structuralists have also removed the messianic elements from Marxism. The young Marx may still have been caught in the mental world of German idealism, but his mature thought escaped this mystical influence. The mature Marx was a scientist who discovered the laws of human history. These laws work themselves out in history as people discard their values and moral ideals, identify themselves fully with the collective self-interest of the classes to which they belong, and become subject to the mechanisms of class conflict and class victory.



Jose Miranda, a Christian theologian committed to social revolution in Latin America, has produced a major study of Marx's thought that is at the same time a vehement polemic against the structuralist Marxists of Latin America. After reading the entire Marxian corpus, in particular Marx's correspondence often neglected by scholars, Miranda analyzes this vast material to show that the central theses of the structuralists are at odds with Marx's thought. Marx stands against the Marxists. Miranda demonstrates that the motive for revolution for Marx was never simply the collective self-interest of workers in a narrow sense; it was a truly human and spiritual quest demanded by man's moral vocation. He shows that structuralists deviate from Marx when they insist that history moves in accordance with certain laws and hence cannot be said to have a subject that freely creates it. Revolution for Marx was precisely the effort to overcome the forces of oppression so that people could become the subject of their own history. Against the structuralists Miranda shows that a determinist understanding of Marxism is false. Marx had a spiritual vision of man, he was in fact a great moralist, and his aspirations were grounded in the Scriptures. The book is well researched, lively, controversial and very interesting to read.

At the same time, the book has no direct relevance for North Americans. We are not surrounded by structural Marxism as the dominant social philosophy ruling our universities and influencing political movements. The point of Miranda's work is therefore lost on us. In Miranda's brilliant tour de force there are, moreover, enormous exaggerations. He tries to prove too much. Marx was not altogether guiltless in the widespread determinist misunderstanding of his thought. Marx was still alive when Engels published a positivistic interpretation of his teacher's theory. Marx made no objections to this. While Miranda does find new material in Marx's letters, it is difficult to go all the way with him, especially when it comes to the grounding of Marxist thought in Scripture. Are we really to believe that Marxism has been, almost from the beginning, a total misunderstanding of Marx? It seems to me that by making Marx into a spiritual humanist, moralist, and crypto-Christian social philosopher and activist, one overlooks the negations in his work, the negations which by themselves may indeed have devastating consequences, but which are so precious and indispensable that they must be taken seriously and eventually overcome in a higher affirmation that leaves them their critical power. The book I highly recommend to the reader is McGovern's *Marxism*.

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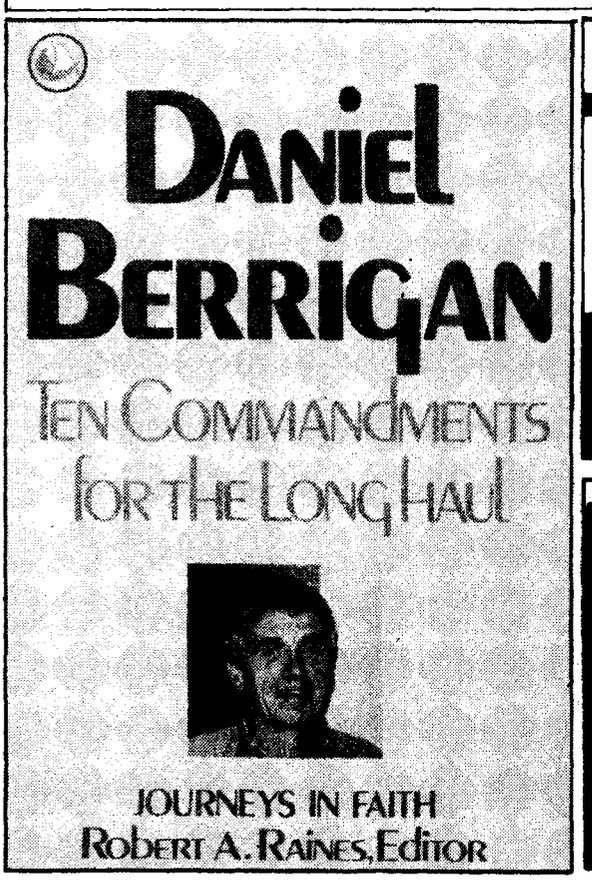

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